

East Ayrshire: Progress and Prospects

Report 2 - What Matters to You: Evaluation Reports 2024

Cathy Sharp, Jo Kennedy, Douglas McKelvie and Donald Scott

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Contents

Preface	5
Glossary of Terms and Acronyms.....	6
Executive Summary.....	8
1. Introduction and background.....	15
1.1 Overview of the approach in East Ayrshire.....	15
1.2 Orientation to this report.....	16
1.3 A flavour of WM2U: orientation through stories	19
2. Creating the conditions by building relationships: 2019-2022.....	21
2.1 The role of the coordinator in foregrounding relationships	21
2.2 Values based leadership experiences (VBLEs)	23
2.3 Purpose and alignment: supporting practitioners as Changemakers	27
2.4 Community leadership: developing the Make it Happen Fund	28
2.5 Community leadership and learning: parents as community researchers	28
2.6 An online learning community, 2021-22	30
2.7 The Lens: moving ideas into action	30
3. Using learning to put values into action 2022.....	32
3.1 Establishing an Oversight and Enabling Board	32
3.2 Shifting to support the implementation of HEART	32
3.3 The need to build on the shared VBLE as a catalyst for action	34
4. Developing understanding of the enablers and barriers to system change 2023 ..	36
4.1 Learning about enablers and barriers.....	36
4.2 Sharing stories to generate insight and support learning and change	37
4.3 Hearing the voice of children and young people	38
4.4 The Hope-Hack (Hackathon).....	38
5. Our learning framework: constructing a joint held ambition based on shared values	40
5.1 Agreement about outcomes and leading indicators	40
5.2 Developing the use of data about the whole population of children	43
6. Learning together: creating the conditions for change, 2023.....	46
6.1 Creating the conditions for change: areas of progress.....	46
6.2 Practising what we all preach	46
7. Leading indicators: emergent and essential change 2024	50
7.1 Beyond Voice: enabling the agency of community members and local practitioners	50

7.2 Enabling the agency of practitioners - perspectives from 2024.....	57
7.3 Leadership: creating the strategic conditions for change	59
8. What outcomes have been achieved? 2024.....	64
8.1 Overview of impact	64
9. Conclusions and implications for East Ayrshire 2024	68
9.1 Learning about enablers and barriers to change.....	68
9.2 Final reflections and implications for system change	71
ANNEX 1: Children’s Lives in East Ayrshire: Selected Data from the Data Compendium.....	74
ANNEX 2: East Ayrshire Stories 2023	77
Bibliography of Learning Partner and Funders Reports	80

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Thanks are due to very many people who have contributed to the work of WM2U in East Ayrshire over the years.

Conventionally reports of this kind are anonymous but we wish to give credit, particularly to the dedication, compassion and thoughtfulness of Fiona Bain the WM2U Coordinator. Credit for their inspiration, commitment and tenacity must also go to the core group of community researchers, Courtney Lennox, Gordon McGuire, Heather Sykes, Jacqueline Cross, and Natalie Carmichael. In turn, they will doubtless cite the wider commitment of many members of the community with which they are engaged and who continue to inspire their work, as they do ours.

There are many others who are practitioners in East Ayrshire across different sectors who have been engaged in some way including those who have taken part in a values-based leadership experience, particularly those that met with parents in Cumnock and the surrounding areas. Many people have generously shared their stories which have been a valuable resource for learning, locally and nationally.

Columba 1400 have been an important partner throughout and with the funders BBC Children in Need and the Hunter Foundation have maintained their original commitment to a family and community-led funding programme to help children and their families thrive even as it has shifted shape and pace. All of us have also had to contend with the challenges of Covid and the inevitable false starts and dead ends of any programme that aspires to be firmly rooted in learning.

The Learning Partner team are, Cathy Sharp (Research for Real), Jo Kennedy (Animate), Emily Whyte (Research for Real) and Douglas McKelvie and Donald Scott (Symmetric Scenarios). As learning partners, we have been alongside since 2019 as both participants and observers, with a commitment to support learning to enable the success of the work. We have come to know the people and the work in unusual and privileged ways. Our role is challenging too, and in writing this account, we acknowledge that there will be different perspectives and distinctions of interpretation. Whilst we hope that what we have written is an authentic and fair account, we are responsible for any errors and omissions.

Preface

Since 2019, there has been a series of learning partner reports, literature reviews and learning updates, many of which are available on the WM2U website.¹ Now in 2024 we are issuing “*Becoming Allies in Change*” a Learning Digest that summaries a portfolio of four learning and evaluation reports based on the experience of working in East Ayrshire and Dundee.

Each of the set are designed to be read as standalone reports, signposting readers to existing reports and accounts which reflect the history and evolution of the thinking and practice of this initiative. Each report has an executive summary and links to earlier WM2U and other relevant reports.

REPORT 1 - PURPOSE Our ambition and key elements of our approach: this paper contains an overview of the key and common elements of WM2U that relate to both areas, East Ayrshire and Dundee. We anticipate that most readers will find it helpful to start with this report, particularly those not already familiar with the work. It will help readers to understand the evolution of the ambition and practices of WM2U, the approach to learning and the overall evidence base.

REPORT 2 - EAST AYRSHIRE This report focuses on the development of WM2U in East Ayrshire and offers an account of the expansion of community-led support and the subsequent formation of the Nest Wellbeing Group (NWBG), now at the forefront of developing a range of health, wellbeing and social activities in Cumnock. This report contains important lessons about the gap between positive aspirations and implementation on the ground, how to enable the agency of community members and local practitioners, and the challenges of creating the strategic conditions for change. Whilst WM2U funding concluded in East Ayrshire in October 2024, the far from unique challenges and insights are likely to be important for others to understand.

REPORT 3 – DUNDEE This report focuses on the development of WM2U in Dundee over the past five years. It details the ambitions and challenges of developing system change in a highly complex environment. After a gradual start in which foundations were laid, but progress was limited, more recently the pace of change has accelerated. The new approach has the backing of strategic leads and is becoming more strongly embedded in the work of local practitioners. Real opportunities are beginning to emerge for long-term system change and funding for this work will continue to 2026.

REPORT 4 - MEASURES THAT MATTER This report is dedicated to the fuller exploration of learning in relation to the conceptual and empirical elements of the measurement of change. It demonstrates our evolution in thinking about how to evaluate impact and brings further benefits of introducing local authorities to new ways of looking at data, working with stories and understanding change.

¹ <https://wm2u.co.uk/our-reports>

Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

Columba 1400: A key delivery partner of What Matters to You, Columba 1400 facilitate values-based leadership experiences for young people, parents, practitioners and Senior Leaders based on their long-standing leadership academies. <https://columba1400.com/>

Delivery Team: the WM2U coordinator, programme manager and funders.

Grow as We Go (GAWG): the shorthand way in which the learning partner teams refer to their approach to learning and evaluation.

Leading Indicators: signs of essential changes that might otherwise be missed, dismissed as intangible or hard to measure. They describe the changes we want to see in positive terms and give early feedback and encouragement to participants.

Learning Framework: a set of outcome and leading indicators that reflects jointly made decisions and agreements about the most important measures of changes that people want to see and helps to guide the work as it proceeds.

Learning Partner: a team of people dedicated to supporting learning throughout the programme, with backgrounds in facilitation, learning, research and evaluation and System Dynamics. www.research-for-real.co.uk
<https://www.animateconsulting.co.uk/> and <https://symmetriclab.com/>

Make it Happen Fund (MIHF): a dedicated fund to shift power, budgets and control into the hands of families and communities.

Outcomes: the ultimate changes that we want to see happening that should be tangible and visible in the community.

Programme Board: a high-level Board made up of the two funders and their staff.

System Change: a way of talking about change that acknowledges the need to change established and deep seated ways of thinking and patterns of behaviour in organisations and communities that continue to produce unwanted outcomes.

System Dynamics (SD): an approach that provides a way of understanding how complex systems change over time by co-creating useful computer simulation models that explore how changes in a wide range of variables are dynamically or causally connected.

The Lens: an organisation which specialises in developing customer-led change, supporting people to develop their ideas for change into workable and fundable projects.

The Nest Wellbeing Group (NWBG): an East Ayrshire community-led charity at the forefront of health and wellbeing activities for the people of Cumnock and the surrounding area. They have a strong focus on recovery and peer support.

Theory of Change: this is a description and illustration of how and why desired changes are expected to happen in a particular context. Usually used in programme planning and evaluation it shows the assumed links between different activities.

Values-based leadership experience (VBLE): a leadership programme facilitated by Columba 1400, to support parents, practitioners, and strategic leaders to work together to put what matters to families first. VBLEs are usually two-day residential programmes, with an initial meeting and a reconnector day shortly afterwards.

Whole Family Wellbeing Fund (WFWF): Scottish Government funding for £500 million investment between 2022 to 2026 to support the whole system transformational change required to reduce the need for crisis intervention and shift investment towards prevention and early intervention.

What Matters to You (WM2U): a name settled on for this work as a neat shorthand that expresses what it is about. With roots in person-centred care and health services in Scotland, this work takes the question out into communities.

Executive Summary

What Matters to You (WM2U) has been working alongside families in Dundee and East Ayrshire to change the way support is offered in communities since 2018. Funded by BBC Children in Need and the Hunter Foundation, the original commitment was for up to £1m in partnership with East Ayrshire Council, with the specific ambition to move public resources to offer support earlier enabling children to flourish within their own families.

WM2U's approach is to work 'alongside' individuals, families, and communities, to listen to what matters, co-create and establish new ways of working. This takes place in the context of long-standing ambitions for public service reform, alongside a range of national and local interventions including The Promise and the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund that seek to support early intervention and prevention.

Despite positive community-led developments, highly valued by the community and some practitioners, overall impact is limited. The early promise of collaborative leadership to develop the potential for wider, systemic impact has not been sustained.

Key features of the WM2U Delivery and Learning Partner approach in East Ayrshire include:

- An active strategic and operational role for one of the funders, the Hunter Foundation as part of the WM2U delivery team and an Oversight and Enabling Board of senior leaders from across the local authority.
- A local Coordinator with strong relational practice skills, working with the Corra Foundation and a small number of highly committed people in the community to significantly expand the ambition, scope and reach of activities, shaped by the wishes of the local community.
- A partnership with Columba 1400 to use their values-based leadership experiences (VBLEs) to create a collective commitment to improvement to support children and families in East Ayrshire, with a total of 80 participants between 2019-23.
- A commitment to on-going learning, co-design of a learning framework, the involvement of small number of parents as community researchers, story gathering and sharing, and System Dynamic modelling.

There are important lessons about implementation so that strategic ambitions for change translate into change on the ground. Practitioners need enabling conditions and support to understand and enact what is being asked of them, with active and collaborative leadership to share insights about effective practices and dismantle the barriers to change. Real collaboration requires positioning the community as a clear and valued partner, much more routine asking and listening to community members and staff, and attention to programme alignment, forms of governance, meeting structures and language.

Leading indicators of emergent and essential change

“A power shift is happening – we are making the right people uncomfortable - the community is realising they have power of their own.” (EA parent, 2023)

The impact of WM2U crucially depends on how it supports more relational and systemic practices amongst all the different stakeholders, as necessary conditions for achieving voice-led place-based system change at scale.

In June 2023, we concluded that there has been progress in creating these conditions for change, in particular:

- The development of safe and welcoming spaces where people can come together, and trust can grow both in the community and between community members and professionals, enabling continuing mutual access to practical help, advice and resources.
- Strong relational practices, working alongside people to develop trust, connection and collaboration fostering trusting and strong relationships, as a basis for identifying and creating systemic solutions to the issues that matters to communities.
- Greater recognition of strengths, achievements and contributions, building on a history of community-based activity and multiple personal and professional contributions to enable those involved in the community-led response to ‘raise their game’.

The commitment and tenacity of WM2U is widely recognised. For those closely involved, June 2023 was a defining moment in the work of WM2U in East Ayrshire when it seemed that mobilising voice and agency around agreed actions, with professionals alongside, could be a significant form of system change.

“It had stuck in my mind that one of the parents at the recent values-based leadership experience had said ‘it’s the small things that make a difference’. I realised that we were asking too much of the mother. Every service had bombarded her with information all at once. I said, ‘I think we need to stop! We are giving you mountains to climb’ – and she said ‘yes, and I can’t even get out of bed’. So, I changed tack and instead I asked, ‘what can I do today?’... [now] she decides what’s important and we tackle it together, but she takes the lead.” (EA practitioner, 2023)

At that time, the best prospects for the future were seen to lie in the collaboration of services and communities with the community as a clear and valued partner, able to draw on untapped resources to reach people, offering timely and ‘real supportive support’.

What matters to you? Outcomes by 2024

Evaluation in 2024 provides an update and more summative view of impact.

A positive difference on the ground

"The ambition and momentum amongst the community is making a positive difference on the ground, a pivotal outcome that parents and carers and others have always seen as central to any measure of success of this work."

The partnership with local parents and carers and with the Corra Foundation has enabled the expansion of community-led support. Community leadership has led to the establishment of the Nest Wellbeing Group ('The Nest') as a community-rooted, peer-to-peer constituted charity at the forefront of developing a range of health, wellbeing and social activities in Cumnock.

This is a significant part of the legacy of WM2U in East Ayrshire with scope to enhance voice and deepen and extend the possibilities for wider system change as their interests and potential contributions to the work of wider partners are more widely recognised.

A sense of belonging to a valued group, feeling that you matter and are valued within it

"The Nest provides a sense of belonging. The realisation of their own vision, now grown significantly beyond the initial desire for a 'home from home' community space, is of immense significance and benefit to the mental and emotional wellbeing of the community."

Practitioners feel welcome and safe in these spaces too, with impacts on the professional practices of some individuals.

Real supportive support

"Small, yet significant examples illustrate the unique value of community-led and peer support, including many ways of helping people to reclaim a sense of control over their own lives and create safer environments for themselves"

This perhaps includes taking the first steps out of the house, building friendships and wider connections, learning to trust others and feeling able to ask for help, wanting to play a more active role in supporting other people, and finding trusted people that can vouch for and help to access wider services. Supportive support also encompasses the provision of practical help, advice and access to resources for practitioners.

Better mental health for children and families

"The shared commitment to address mental health is a community priority and a galvanising force."

Recent positive signs of progress include better understanding about what is needed in the community, wider awareness of neurodiversity, adverse childhood experiences, and the impact of parental mental health on children. The Nest have secured resources for training, much of which has been related to mental health and wellbeing. Nevertheless, wider national and local trends are not encouraging and there are still issues of stigma, a lack of understanding about trauma and recovery, and deaths from suicide and drugs.

A sense of looking towards a positive future

“The growth of safety and trust has encouraged growing individual and collective agency amongst community members, often built despite considerable personal hardship and trauma.”

The achievements of the Nest are based on their growing strengths as a group, greater trust and a sense that ‘lived experience is getting a hearing’, with some professionals doing some small, but significant things differently. Their focus gives them a sanguine and pragmatic attitude towards the future and a confidence that, given their experience, they will continue to thrive.

There have been positive developments for some practitioners through their connections to the Nest, which has made them feel more welcome in community meetings and spaces. The small group of practitioners that were part of a joint VBLE with parents remain committed to a voice-led approach but have not felt able to enact this beyond fragmented individual responses and some new connections. They have felt hindered by leadership and organisational barriers which they believe have failed to engage with the need for change or develop the strategic conditions that would enable it.

Leadership: creating the strategic conditions for change

Senior leaders acknowledge the trust and empowerment that has been built by WM2U with parents and community members and value the demonstration of the importance of voice. They recognise that there are significant strengths and assets in communities and amongst practitioners that could be built upon.

- Community-led developments have helped some senior leaders to understand what parents do offer and the further potential, and at times has countered their fear of being criticised or of raising expectations that could not be met.
- As part of the development of the learning framework, senior leaders developed the specific ambition to explore the scope to develop linkages between datasets to support the use of data about the whole population of children.

However, the early promise of WM2U for collaborative leadership with and amongst senior leaders was not sustained and individual insights have been fleeting and largely lost as opportunities for the funders and the Oversight and Enabling Board to develop the potential for wider, systemic impact.

“Everyone involved had hoped to be in a better place at this time and the challenges of ‘going to scale’ remain. The community-led developments risk being too readily dismissed as small scale, insignificant or ‘not representative’ of the wider community and not understood in terms of the wider relevance and potential.”

Whilst senior leaders had nominal oversight, in practice, WM2U was seen as a ‘distraction’ or ‘an extra thing to do’ rather than as a way to deliver the local authority’s core mission or the aims of public service reform.

The relationships, priorities and different leadership styles of key players meant that leaders did not collaborate amongst themselves or with WM2U to meet those aspirations. Apparent ‘permissions’ given to work differently from senior leaders have not been translated into actions and practices.

The challenges of operating in a ‘muddy’ or ‘cluttered’ landscape risks duplication and a failure to develop potential synergy between different programmes and approaches including those of the Scottish Government. Continuing siloed working and working practices that were a feature of the pandemic, conflict avoidance and duplication of effort, create disillusionment and absence, a culture of fear and blaming of others.

There is acknowledgement that these issues of implementation are not unique to WM2U. The conclusions largely dovetail with those of the East Ayrshire Children’s Services Review in June 2024, which identified the need to improve collaborative leadership across and within the Council. This report articulates several proposals from senior leaders.

Looking ahead

System change is ultimately about changing ways of thinking and doing, norms, and power relations, to shift the deeper levers of change. Given this, relational practice rooted in the qualities of flexibility, taking time, staying curious, perseverance, integrity, pragmatism and humility, and the valuing of individual and collective capabilities, is an important foundation for any kind of collaborative, systemic change.

The challenges to senior leaders to collaborate, engage with and contribute to learning, and the call to adapt will require a significant cultural and organisational shift. This stark reality is acknowledged by senior leaders.

“They hope that there can be better mutual understanding and collaborative leadership to unlock the undoubted potential and commitment to change for children, young people and families amongst practitioners, parents and senior leaders.”

BBC Children in Need and the Hunter Foundation took the decision to conclude their funding WM2U in East Ayrshire in September 2024.

In the light of these developments, this report highlights:

- The value of getting out into the community to experience the warmth of welcome, listen to people and build relationships has been demonstrated: more practitioners and senior leaders need to themselves become participants in community.
- Different conversations on a more routine basis with families can find the small things that will help in the view of the families themselves. This will help to develop a primary focus on potential and not need, not seeing people as something to be 'fixed' or dismissed as not representative.
- Such a shift in routine practices will take sustained effort, honesty, humility and willingness to compromise; to ask, understand and act on what matters to people.
- Many adults sincerely want to be advocates for children. The routine inclusion of either children or families in designing support or contributing to staff learning and development will depend on the engagement of an appropriate group of senior leaders and practitioners, open to this influence on their practice and with the skills, permissions and opportunities to engage with children and young people.
- Sharing practice learning amongst practitioners, wider teams and senior leaders should help to address some of the 'lower key challenges' of prevention or early intervention, where it may be possible to stop things escalating or support de-escalation. This will help to recognise 'prevention' as a dynamic, responsive process, rather than a downstream reaction to a crisis or event.
- How meetings are convened and facilitated is a significant element of organisational culture as this offers space for people to feel heard and to take a leadership role in their own lives and within their job role, regardless of seniority. Language and the chance to explore meaning with each other is important, as it influences the ability to engage with or deter people in the community and within organisations.
- A way forward would be to keep celebrating what is going right, to take small steps that can be built on and which are less overwhelming for both parents and practitioners.
- Continuous learning is key. There is a need to find mechanisms to notice and share the 'green shoots', to disseminate more widely and encourage others to adopt positive practices. This is an essential first route to scale of any kind.
- Continued sponsorship of work to develop the use of data about the whole population of children will enable greater use of data to support improvement and ultimately enable the demonstration of any shift of resources to early intervention and prevention in East Ayrshire.

There remain considerable challenges. There is a need to recognise what support communities require to be resilient and play their part. This may need greater realism about community aspirations and capacities, and an understanding of optimal

synergy between community-led and peer support and the specific needs that only commissioned or statutory services can address.

Furthermore, the context of austerity for families, the tail-end of the Covid-19 pandemic and recovery from it, restrictive public spending, and changes in key personnel, further highlights significant challenges to make the fullest expression of the common purposes to improve the lives of children and families a reality. A radical departure from the past will be needed to confront the gap between aspirations and practices, with a focus on learning throughout, to embed positive developments and practices.

1. Introduction and background

This report focuses on the development of WM2U in East Ayrshire. There has been a divergence of approaches in Dundee and East Ayrshire over time, reflecting different local conditions and progress. In East Ayrshire, the original focus was on working with parents in Cumnock and those with a connection to the Barony Campus, with the intention to scale the approach across the local authority. In Dundee, after a similar start to East Ayrshire, WM2U shifted to operate as a strategic enabler, working alongside practitioners with strong authorisation from senior leaders, using in-house Community Learning and Development (CLD) activities as a vehicle for learning and embedding system change. These contrasting experiences bring both the ambitions and challenges of system change to life in different ways and illustrate the diverse elements of a voice-led approach to system change.

1.1 Overview of the approach in East Ayrshire

BBC Children in Need and The Hunter Foundation agreed to commit up to £1m in partnership with East Ayrshire Council in an investment in developing a systemic change programme initiated in the Barony Campus in East Ayrshire with the intention to scale the approach across the local authority. At the beginning, it was assumed that this would be a focused approach with an agreed number of children, young people and families on 'the edge of care' alongside a more general support network for the wider community. Whilst the approach has evolved since that time, key features of the East Ayrshire approach have been:

- An active strategic and operational role for the Hunter Foundation as part of the WM2U delivery team, based on long-standing local connections and established relationships.²
- A Strategic Board chaired by the original local authority Chief Executive in place from 2018 until August 2020, with a remit to provide oversight, alignment and access to new innovations that could be played into the programme of work.
- After retirement of the original CEO, a new Chief Executive started at the end of 2020. Subsequently the remit of the group was revised, and membership reviewed to establish a WM2U Oversight and Enabling Board of senior leaders from across the local authority from April 2022. This was chaired by the Senior Nurse Manager Children's Service's East Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership and last met in May 2023.
- A partnership with Columba 1400 to use their values-based leadership experiences (VBLEs) to create a collective commitment to improvement to support children and families in East Ayrshire. Overall, between 2020 and early 2023, eighty people have been involved in at least one VBLE, 24 parents and 56 staff, across six different cohorts, including 12 strategic leaders.

² See Report 1.

- A local coordinator with strong relational practice skills, able to offer practical help and support to parents and families during the Covid-19 pandemic, working alongside people in the community and other partners to build relationships, and develop trust and confidence.
- Recognition of a history of community-based activity and multiple personal and professional contributions as the basis on which WM2U supported developments have taken place. There was a foundation of volunteer-led wellbeing focused groups and informal support for the most vulnerable community members in Cumnock which had relied on goodwill, and voluntary efforts and finance for many years.³
- Since 2019, WM2U worked with a small number of highly committed individuals in the community and the Corra Foundation to significantly expand the ambition, scope and reach of community-led support.⁴ This has led to the formation of the Nest Wellbeing Group (NWBG) in September 2022 and their establishment as a SCIO in December 2022. The Nest are now at the forefront of developing a range of health, wellbeing and social activities in Cumnock.⁵
- On-going learning has been supported by a small number of parents who have been involved in WM2U as community researchers since January 2022, culminating in their co-design and facilitation of a community learning event in June 2023. Story gathering and sharing has also been an important part of the overall approach.
- BBC Children in Need and the Hunter Foundation took the decision to conclude funding WM2U in East Ayrshire in September 2024.⁶
- East Ayrshire continues to sponsor the exploration of the potential for data alignment by exploring if and how linkages between datasets can be achieved, to develop the use of data to describe the population of children and young people in GIRFEC terms. Connections with Dundee and with the wider national data work of WM2U should help to maintain momentum and generate recognition for the strategic and operational value of this work.

1.2 Orientation to this report

This report is written largely chronologically to enable readers to follow the evolving story of WM2U. Figure 1.1 below shows a selective timeline of key activities and events in East Ayrshire. A selection of stories is included in Section 1.3 and Annex 2 to help readers orientate themselves to the purpose and possibilities of voice-led system change. The initial sections of this report describe earlier developments to set the scene for a discussion of leading indicators and outcomes in 2024 in sections 7 and 8. Readers that

³ As a member of the community, Natalie Carmichael had been running wellbeing focused groups and supporting the most vulnerable community members in Cumnock as a volunteer, without any formal funding, for over 10 years.

⁴ The Corra Foundation has worked alongside community members in the area to help identify aspirations and priorities since 2016. An update and fuller information about this support are available here <https://www.corra.scot/cumnock-annual-update-2023/> .

⁵ <https://thenestwellbeinggroup.co.uk/>

⁶ <https://wm2u.co.uk/news/east-ayrshire>

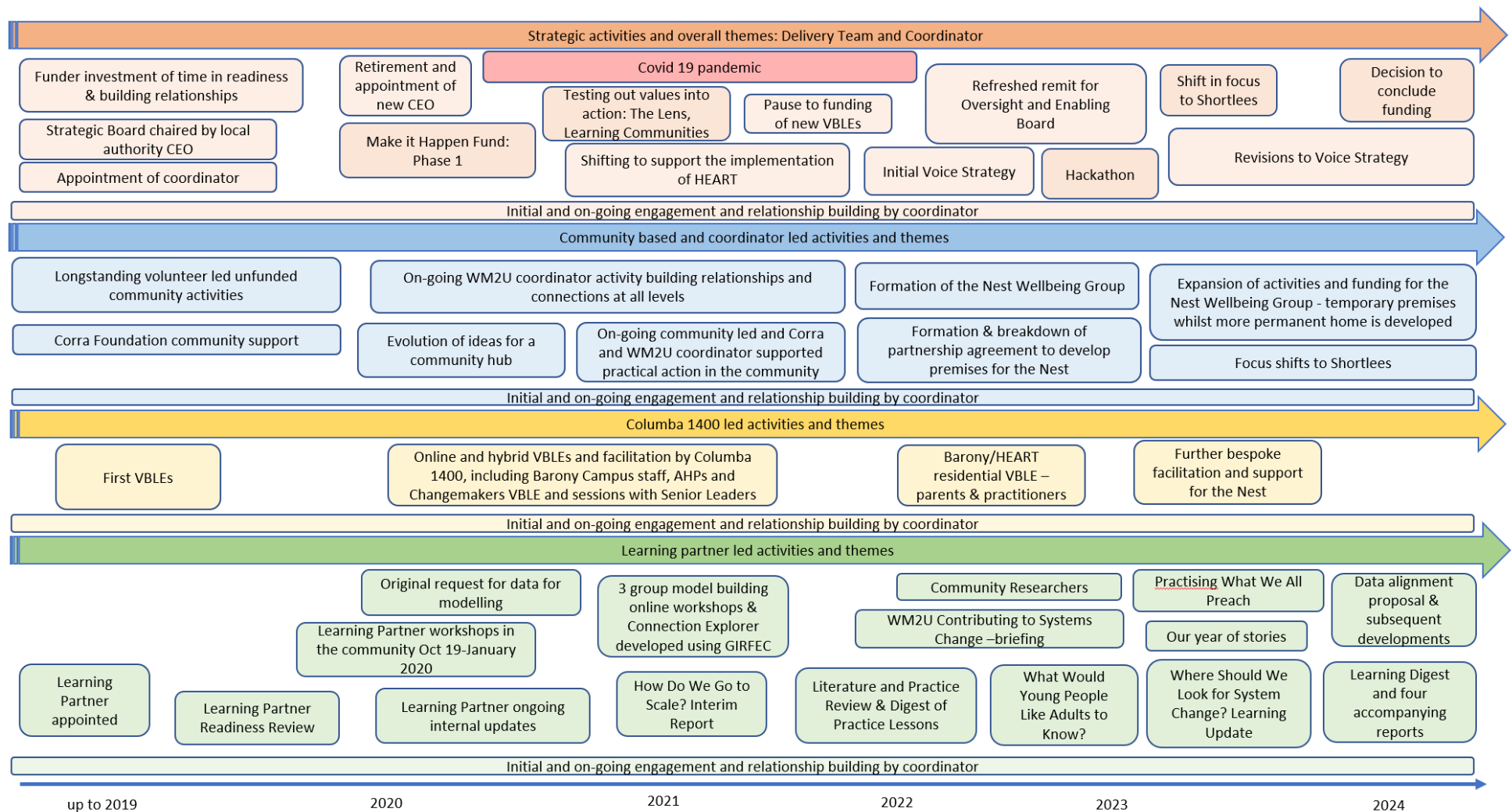
are unfamiliar with this work may appreciate the background and chronology in the earlier sections, whilst others may want to start with sections 7 and 8. A fuller account of the basis and background to WM2U is detailed in Report 1.

- Section 2 discusses the efforts to create the conditions for change between 2019 and 2022, including the early experience of VBLEs, the development of community researchers, a learning community and The Lens.
- Section 3 describes a shift in WM2U to support the implementation of HEART in 2022 and associated efforts to build on the experience of VBLEs.
- Section 4 explores developing understanding of the enablers and barriers to change that followed on from the last VBLE and the experience of the HEART model in 2023.
- Section 5 explores the development of the learning framework, including learning about the use of data about the whole population of children through the modelling work.
- Section 6 takes stock of the areas of progress by June 2023
- Taking stock in 2024, section 7 describes the leading indicators that demonstrate important shifts in thinking and practice, whilst section 8 explores outcomes that have been achieved.
- Section 9 draws conclusions and highlights implications for East Ayrshire.

Annex 1 provides useful statistical data as context for the work of WM2U and gives a flavour of the social conditions of the communities in which this work is taking place. In East Ayrshire as a whole, more than one in four children under 16 are living in poverty.

Annex 2 includes a selection of stories that show the impact of WM2U for some individuals and professional practices.

Figure 1.1: A selected timeline of key elements of WM2U in East Ayrshire



1.3 A flavour of WM2U: orientation through stories

These three stories from 2021 were collated by the Community Researchers and the WM2U coordinator. They describe the same experience from the perspective of the three main parties involved. They credit the protagonists and are used with their permission. We foreground these here to orientate readers to the purpose and potential of greater engagement between parents and professionals.

Talking about School Counselling, 2021

The WM2U coordinator's story

As the WM2U coordinator I met Kerry through the GIRFEC group in East Ayrshire and have followed up on our initial meeting with a few 1:1 conversations. I know that Kerry is passionate about young people.

Parents had been sharing with me how difficult it was to receive support in school, particularly around children and young people's mental health. I knew that Kerry would be open to a conversation and after some initial planning we arranged for this happen in person.

We met in a community centre, a building that parents were comfortable with. Kerry brought the doughnuts, and we had some tea and coffee and had a really informal conversation about what school counselling was, what was on offer and where Kerry saw some gaps. Kerry then opened the conversation up and spent 2.5 hours talking to the ten parents about what really mattered in their own lives but also within a school context.

Parents made various suggestions of ways that perhaps things could be better. They said that they had valued the conversation, and the time Kerry took out of her day to really listen. One parent thanked Kerry for being "human" and looked forward to any changes.

Fiona Bain

A parents experience

I was part of a group of parents that went to meet Kerry, the school counselling coordinator for East Ayrshire. I went along because I was excited about what mental health and well-being could look like for children and young people. It is a total passion for me. I wanted to see what was happening around mental health and wellbeing. With everything that has happened within the last few years, to see it being highlighted within the school for the pupils, there seemed to be a sense of possibility and that excited me.

I was nervous before going, I was unsure about meeting new people. I wondered how I would come across, what she and other people would think of me and what I would say. I was flustered going into somewhere strange. I felt a wee bit panicky.

The welcome we got made me feel less nervous. The people were so welcoming and just relaxed. They were human, smiled, we had a blether, a laugh, it broke the ice, and we had a wee cup of tea. The welcome and the positivity from everyone made me feel welcome.

I think what was going through my mind was that 'I've heard all this before'....and it never appears. But through the meeting, she was saying 'well, this is in place...and this...' The evidence was there within the meeting, to say that 'we're working hard and we're going to do this, we're not just telling you stories, it's actually happening'. She was also very honest. She admitted that the waiting lists are longer than they want them to be, but that they were trying to work on cutting that down and I believed her. It was good to know that things were in place and Kerry was able to give us some real, concrete examples. I felt exhilarated after the meeting because I can see so many possibilities.

Heather Sykes

The School Counselling Coordinator's experience

Last week I was given the opportunity to meet with a fantastic group of parents to discuss what mattered to them in terms of the School Counselling Service.

Meeting the parents and listening to their views and experiences gave me much clearer picture of some of the work we still need to do with the service in terms of ensuring everyone knows what support is available and how they can access it. The group were able to give me lots of valuable advice on how to improve the service so that it is accessible to all.

However, although the group gave me lots of useful feedback on the service, without a doubt the single most important thing I took away was how passionate they are about supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their children. The group all had an interest in mental health and some of them had already attended training. Some of the stories and experiences they shared made me realise how far we've come in terms of raising awareness of the importance of mental health and wellbeing. A few of the group indicated they were keen to attend more training and that they would love to be part of a programme that rolled this out to other parents. A key action for me is to ensure I work with other colleagues to provide them with these opportunities and utilise their skills and passion to enable them to support other parents.

Going forward, meeting the group made me realise how important it is to hear the voice of parents and young people before making any decisions that may affect them. I learned so much from them in one morning and want to ensure that the views of parents and young people are at the heart of all we do in East Ayrshire. The group gave me the opportunity to really listen and for the group to be truly heard. This level of engagement is just not possible using methods such as surveys etc so inspired me to change the way we engage with parents and young people in the future.

Kerry Jarvis (Craig)

Further stories in Annex 2 illustrate important small shifts in thinking and practice that offer fresh insights about individual change as necessary first steps for any wider actions that might be possible pathways to system change.

2. Creating the conditions by building relationships: 2019-2022

2.1 The role of the coordinator in foregrounding relationships

Our interim report in March 2021 set the scene at an important stage of the work of WM2U, drawing on material from earlier reports.⁷ It illustrated how WM2U had focused on ‘creating the conditions for change’ through building relational working with people whose voices had been marginalised, and with locally based professionals and local voluntary and community sector organisations. The WM2U Delivery Team had also established good relationships with senior leaders, built on the foundation established during the initial Columba 1400 leadership experience and established a Strategic Board chaired by the local authority Chief Executive.

Figure 1.1 provides a visual overview of the range of activities undertaken by the WM2U Delivery, Columba 1400 and Learning Partner teams. This activity has all involved the WM2U Coordinator and whilst it does not capture everything, it gives a flavour of the scope and sequence of activities.

The focus of the coordination role has included building relationships amongst parents in the community and with a range of practitioners and senior leaders in the local authority and third sector, support for the recruitment of participants in VBLEs and follow up activities, and engagement in the governance, accountability and learning elements of the work. Characterised as ‘relational practice’, the approach of the coordinator has offered a challenge to established notions of whose experiences and knowledge are valued and important insights into how to engage to bring ‘voice’ to the fore in meaningful ways.

The period 2019-22 saw both significant challenges and opportunities, which, as they have been worked through, have expanded trust amongst the stakeholders. The WM2U coordinator has sought to ‘front-load relationships’ by being flexible, taking the time to understand others, and modelling a spirit of curiosity.

“My approach was to genuinely get to know and hold the hands of people who needed support, which was parents and practitioners working with and in the unknown. On reflection, I wasn’t action or task focused, because I didn’t know the direction of travel and what was possible. [This] provided time to develop relationships and develop the work organically. Relational practice

⁷ <https://wm2u.co.uk/resource/what-matters-you-how-do-we-go-scale> Earlier reports include a literature review (December 2019), a learning update (May 2020), a working paper based on interviews with parents, senior leaders, funders and delivery team members (Jan 2020) and meeting notes and Board papers dating back to the commencement of the work in early 2019.

enabled me to be based 'in the heart,' of the community, and responsive to evolving and changing needs." (EA, Coordinator, 2024)

Valuing individual and collective strengths and capabilities and seeking to build relationships with and between community members has been an important aspect of the coordinators practice. This has built individual and collective capabilities and developed shared values necessary for the longer-term. The COVID pandemic and the funders decision to continue at that time, offered an unforeseen opportunity to be alongside people and understand what they needed and wanted in a very practical sense. This proved in time to have been particularly important in the development of trust and confidence between and with local people.

Relational practice involves getting to know people and professionals beyond their role or responsibilities, whilst also understanding their personal and organisational pressures and their 'spheres of influence'. It helps to develop a fuller appreciation of their values and motivations, as well as the frustrations and barriers (e.g. of permission and time), that may impede their ability to adapt their practice and 'truly listen' to people.

"There are barriers that sometimes none of us can get through, and culturally there are things we don't fully understand. The work can sometimes take its toll, because it requires effort to cut through challenges and be immersed in a culture of negativity, especially when you are inherently positive and upbeat."
(EA, Coordinator, 2024)

This period proved to be an important and formative time in which learning has worked both ways: the coordinator learnt from working with individuals and groups of people in the community and in turn, helped to shape community understanding of how different professions and services work, who they are for, their scope and limitations.

Building connections with different professional groups has also supported their participation in the VBLEs and for some, built their own connections with community members. The rest of this section highlights the experience of the VBLEs and other important elements of this stage of the work of WM2U.

2.2 Values based leadership experiences (VBLEs)

Columba 1400 Values Based Leadership Experiences (VBLEs) were funded to create the foundations for the system change which WM2U seeks to promote and embed. VBLEs are designed to support parents, practitioners, and strategic leaders to work together to put what matters to families first.⁸ Figure 2.1 illustrates participation in VBLEs between 2019 - 2023.

Figure 2.1: VBLE participation 2019-2023

Date	Focus	Places
2019-22	Parents (3 groups)	24
2019-20	Strategic Leaders	12
2021-22	Barony Campus Staff	11
2021-22	Changemakers Group (HEART)	12
2022	Allied Health Professionals	9
2022-23	Mixed Staff & Parents	17
	TOTAL	85

Feedback from successive VBLEs has been consistently positive. The VBLE model in East Ayrshire started with groups of parents with a few school staff in attendance, then changed to be parents-only in a more community focused approach, ultimately bringing parents together with community-based practitioners. This reflected the development of a theory of change that brought people together to shape joint interests and identify ideas to be taken forward.

- The first VBLEs were held with parents in 2019. Twelve strategic leaders attended a WM2U values-based leadership residential in January 2020, with a reconnect day in early March 2020.
- Overall, between 2020 and early 2023, eighty people have been involved in at least one VBLE, 24 parents and 56 staff, across eight different cohorts.⁹

The senior leaders valued the strong sense of good relationships amongst themselves, and better understanding of respective roles and shared ambitions for children in East Ayrshire. This had been an unusual and 'well-protected' time, with the 'safe space' enabling people to reflect, explore and share their personal and professional motivations and values. Some potential challenges were acknowledged, including the need to build synergy and alignment between different programmes.

In the circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, the WM2U engagement work continued, with a strong practical element within the community and on-line offerings wherever possible; securing time to focus on creating the conditions for long-term change was not a priority. The local coordinator focused on practical support and building relationships within the local community. This was a 'powerful time' that brought the realisation that so

⁸ The purpose and experience of VBLEs is discussed in full in Report 1.

⁹ Five people have attended more than one VBLE, including three parents.

many needs were being missed, even by those who lived locally and thought they knew the area well.

During this period, Columba 1400 facilitated:

- on-line conversations amongst a smaller group of the senior leaders drawn from across social work, education, health and social care and community development
- three VBLE cohorts entirely online or as hybrid offerings during the Covid pandemic in 2021 and 2022, including an online ChangeMakers VBLE for a group of East Ayrshire practitioners and a 'Community Leaders' programme for parents.

This latter programme aimed to build confidence and facilitation skills amongst community members and included parents from WM2U in Dundee and from a similar programme from Clackmannanshire.

The impact of VBLEs for parents and community leaders

Parents described feeling that they matter, are important, talented, and valued, and have something to offer to others.¹⁰ They talked about having better skills and the 'mental bravery to keep going', whilst keen to be face-to-face with people and out in the community. Notably:

- The strong sense of collective purpose and shared will to make a difference in the community remained, and there was real eagerness for the restrictions of the Covid period to be lifted to allow earlier momentum with plans to be recovered.
- The parents expressed an understanding of the potential for themselves as leaders in their own lives and in their communities. There was a clear desire to be part of things as 'parents supporting parents' able to offer a unique more approachable route for people who might be wary of formal services.
- More informal networks of support amongst parents were developing amongst those connected through WM2U, enabling people to ask for and offer help and support to each other and to others who have not been part of WM2U.

The Community Leaders had a long-term perspective, seeing their engagement with Columba 1400 and WM2U as the start of an anticipated longer involvement. The chance to be part of the design of the *Make it Happen Fund* was a valued opportunity to contribute in a practical way. Opportunities to meet with local Strategic Leaders and with the Funders Programme Board had also been important.

"Attending the Board Meeting with the funders was amazing. It was amazing to be included. I was impressed we were granted the opportunity. They are

¹⁰ Four parents from East Ayrshire were interviewed in May and June 2021, three of which were repeat interviews. Key messages are included in an animation available here <https://youtu.be/WBWsJMXUfkk>

always well impressed. It's about being on the ground, they're not on the ground, we are the messengers from the ground.” (EA, parent, 2021)

The proposed learning framework indicators of outcomes at family and community level were seen to capture the overall ambition. Whilst there was little tangible change in the community at this time, parents spoke readily about the changes they saw in themselves and those they connect with through WM2U. They described how their own changing perspective was influencing their lives and there were examples of significant changes for individuals, such as getting a job or being able to open up to other people about their lives.

“I haven't really noticed much in the community. But at home and with my family it's changing the way that I see them. How I relate to my close family members, the way they are doesn't get to me in the same way it used to. It's good understanding other people and how they behave. I've been using a bit more humour with them.” (EA, parent, 2021)

“With WM2U there's no hierarchy. WM2U doesn't make me feel 'less' ... The people they've linked into this – they're pulling in the quiet ones. One parent who previously was too unconfident to even sit next to people, slowly grew more confident and now with WM2U support has got a job.” (EA, parent, 2021)

Parents talked about the importance of trust and continuity as part of the specific offer of WM2U:

“We've lost the heart in services - What Matters to You is about motivation, it's a feeling, and we are already seeing changes in parenting. The What Matters to You attitude is, 'I'm walking besides you', whereas one of the parents told me she doesn't trust services, they let her down and there's no follow through, and they highlight what she's doing wrong.” (EA, parent, 2021)

Whilst there were positive signs of change, parents were taking the long view, expecting to see a ripple-effect, and talked about getting into the right frame of mind, taking a step at a time.

“It's about the ripple effects - we have to do the small things at a cellular level, start small fires, we can't expect to see the bigger impact yet.” (EA, parent, 2021)

The relationships and connections forged by the WM2U coordinator in these early years of WM2U during the COVID pandemic have lasted, despite some significant challenges, discussed more fully in section 6.

The impact of VBLEs for senior leaders

The senior leaders expressed gratitude that this on-line support continued and acknowledged both the limitations of on-line engagement and their own desire to be able to commit more time to this work.

“These [sessions] are an opportunity to take stock, they're the only spaces when you get to think how are you? How are you coping? Everything else is a meeting about business, about where we need to go. It's almost a time to heal. It's the only time I've stopped and took stock.” (EA, SL, 2021)

Amongst the leaders and parents, there was a sense of realism and understanding that some time and momentum has been lost due to Covid, however the positive foundations established during their initial engagement seemed to be maintained.

For senior leaders, the ‘significant engagement’ of WM2U with parents illustrated the potential for developing a better understanding of their perspectives and the possibilities for mobilising that voice for wider benefit.

“It has given us really amazing contact with families who've experienced significant trauma and who are now able to speak up and let their voices be heard. It's not a self-need, but they have a passion, and want to stop that happening for others.” (EA, SL, 2021)

In policy terms, WM2U was seen to align well with existing programmes and the broader goals of public service reform. This situation also created a need to consider the practicalities of ‘alignment’ and a need to ‘stitch things together’ to ensure the distinct offering and complementarity of WM2U was understood. The necessity to talk more about their own collaboration was also noted, alluding to the challenges of a significantly different way of working.

“I think we need an ongoing collaborative model of public services: it's important that we talk about what collaboration means ... for me it's about co-creation so that we all have ownership. ... It is a bit of a sea change because this has not been the underpinning ethos of how we have delivered services in the past. There is a lot to unpick. It's about co-creation and ... we have to let go of a lot of our historical ways of working.” (EA, SL, 2021)

The learning review also highlighted other issues for WM2U, including how to balance the 'big ambitions' with realistic goals, and questions about how to achieve greater reach to more parents; this was felt to be important to give confidence that the approach was well-grounded and 'value for money'.

2.3 Purpose and alignment: supporting practitioners as Changemakers

Issues of purpose and alignment were also highlighted by the Changemakers VBLE that commenced in January 2021. This was an on-line cohort of 13 multi-agency local practitioners held in early 2021, convened around a practical focus on the development of the East Ayrshire Children's Services Wellbeing Model (WBM), intended to change the way that children and families were supported across East Ayrshire.¹¹

The underpinning values and the building blocks of the WBM were felt to be strongly aligned with the goals and approach of WM2U; essentially to make help available to families when and where they need it, shifting the focus from crisis response to early help and prevention and from remote, centralised services to support being available within communities.

The WM2U Coordinator played an important role in inviting people to become part of the Changemakers group and in effect, it became a 'joint initiative'. The feedback from the participants in this VBLE was highly positive and demonstrated an appetite to hear more from parents.

In summer 2021 we undertook a learning review interviewing parents and community leaders, senior leaders, and participants of the "ChangeMakers" VBLE. This showed that whilst the participation of the WM2U Coordinator was valued, it was nevertheless evident that, by and large, participants did not know of the connection with WM2U, the ambition of WM2U for system change, or who had funded the programme, seen as a 'Columban' programme.

"I didn't really know what the WM2U role was in relation to the Changemakers group. I knew they were to do the Wellbeing Model, but then I got a sense that WM2U were involved.....It wasn't made clear to me, how that had come about or what the WM2U role was in terms of the group and the WBM. There was where it got a wee bit muddy...." (EA, SL, 2021)

Practitioners saw strong alignment with their own work and the ambition of the WBM and there was an appetite and energy for change. They wanted to see an end to silo working, to improve communication amongst different practitioner groups, to generate positive thinking about what's possible for children and young people and take action to address

¹¹ Work on the model started in late 2019 and early 2020 but was delayed by the onset of Covid-19. A full-time programme lead from within Social Work began work in October 2020. This later became known as HEART

poverty. Other concerns were that many children were ‘under the radar’ and that the pandemic may not be the best time to seek change.

These tensions reflect the practical realities of that time, with goodwill and commitment and a desire to offer support amongst practitioners, coming up against the limitations and pressures of the everyday challenges of delivering services during a pandemic. At that time, there were felt to be good prospects to use the Changemakers to accelerate the work of WM2U. The group had expressed an interest in finding dedicated time and space to offer peer support to one another, to listen to families and put their voice at the heart of their day-to-day work and to work more collaboratively to design support and services that are useful for families. These ambitions influenced the thinking about next steps and led to the attempts to establish learning communities.¹²

2.4 Community leadership: developing the Make it Happen Fund

At this time, some parents were also involved in the development of the *Make it Happen Fund* (MIHF), seen as a demonstration of how funding might be used to mobilise the voice of parents. The establishment of the Fund involved consultation with parents about the setup, distribution, and management of the funds. East Ayrshire parents and carers contributed to the design of an application process, and some were involved in the management of the fund. Delayed by Covid and difficulties in setting up an accountability structure for dispersing the funds, funding was awarded to seven East Ayrshire families in Summer 2021.¹³

2.5 Community leadership and learning: parents as community researchers

In July 2021, WM2U took forward a learning partner proposal to involve a small number of community leaders in gathering feedback from other parents and being involved in collective sense-making activities. This ‘in principle’ idea for peer research was made possible by the interest of a small group of parents, the significant preparatory engagement work undertaken by the coordinator and for some, the experience of attending a VBLE and the Community Leaders programme.

Seven parents attended the initial on-line meeting in January 2022. Three further on-line meetings were held and focused on exploration of what it might mean to be a community researcher, including practice in generating and sharing stories, talking about ways of working and ethical practices and developing the provisional indicators as part of the learning framework.

Agreement about ways of working was distilled into a short ‘advice to ourselves’ poster, shared at the first face-to-face meeting with other interested parents in April 2022.¹⁴

¹² Several Changemakers became the nucleus of the first learning community in East Ayrshire that met in December 2021. (see report 1).

¹³ A separate review of the Make It Happen Fund in 2021 is included in Report 1.

¹⁴ Nine parents attended.

The April 2022 session used creative methods to highlight the provisional leading indicators and encourage reflection on achievements to date, what is changing, and how to move forward. The subsequent discussion highlighted concerns about parents not being heard within schools, bullying of children with ADHD in playground and school absence or exclusion. Noting the delays caused by Covid, there was a desire to overcome the 'them and us' feeling and to work positively with the relevant professionals. Their experience of meeting with the school counselling coordinator had given them greater confidence and a sense of possibility.¹⁵ A subsequent community research session focused on generating and sharing stories, with participants increasingly taking on roles within the group. Stories developed with the community researchers have been shared within the learning community and at team GAWG meetings.



In May 2022, a community research session focused on refining the leading indicators and proved to be useful to demonstrate the similarity in ambition of the parents and professionals, making a significant contribution to the development and use of the learning framework.¹⁶

¹⁵ This experience is included in a set of three stories about the same meeting, told from different perspectives in section 1.

¹⁶ The group met again in September 2022 and reconvened in March 2023, to plan the cofacilitation of a Grow as We Go learning event in June 2023 discussed in section 6.2.

2.6 An online learning community, 2021-22

An East Ayrshire learning community met online between December 2021 and June 2022.¹⁷ The participants came from across the local authority, including Social Work, Vibrant Communities, the NHS, the third sector and Ayrshire College. Whilst about half of participants had been part of the Changemakers VBLE, this was offered more widely to practitioners interested in working differently to make an impact for children and young people.

“...I think there was a will to do things, not just talk, to listen to what the challenges are. I’m tremendously optimistic.” (East Ayrshire Changemaker, 2021)

There was interest in learning more about how this work might take shape and people were eager to build on their earlier experience and interests. The participants wanted new connections and protected space for action and reflection to enable them to make a difference on the ground. There was agreement about the value of hearing from parents, and questions about how the children’s voices could also be heard.

The WM2U Coordinator and learning partner also hosted drop-in sessions with learning community members to facilitate a greater mutual understanding of the purpose of the community and the part people may play in it. Subsequently the group discussed their on-going work, and new ideas for small tests of change. The group emphasised the importance of building in meaningful measures of impact and contributed to the development of the learning framework.

Despite their ambition to work with families, it was difficult to make this a practical reality: participants struggled to develop a shared focus of activity given their existing workloads and to prioritise their engagement in the learning community. By June 2022, some of the members of the learning community were involved in developing ideas alongside parents as part of the Lens, and this became the focus.

2.7 The Lens: moving ideas into action

In December 2021, WM2U commissioned The Lens, an organisation which specialises in supporting ‘intrapreneurs’, to set up and deliver a programme in each area to move ideas into action.¹⁸ The WM2U team invited local people and practitioners to put forward their ideas and assessed these using investment criteria which reflected the values and vision of WM2U. In East Ayrshire, fourteen ideas were submitted and five taken forward at an ‘investment day’ in May 2022.¹⁹

¹⁷ Eleven people attended the first session from a wider group of around fourteen people, of which about six had been part of the online Changemakers VBLE.

¹⁸ <https://www.thisislens.co.uk/>

¹⁹ East Ayrshire <https://vimeo.com/720192911>

Many of these ideas were linked to the desire of parents and people working in the community to have a welcoming space, referred to as a 'community living room' or Wellbeing Hub, with the aim of bettering the lives of people in Cumnock as well as support for primary school children in Muirkirk.²⁰ All five ideas that were pitched secured a total of £31,300 worth of investment including £11,300 from East Ayrshire Council, with senior managers and partner organisations publicly supported the approach.

Four of the original ideas have now been taken forward and developed by the Nest, with support from the WM2U coordinator, with one still to be completed.

2.8 Insights about children's lives

The ambition for voice-led system change articulated by WM2U has been framed as primarily the voice of parents and carers, with the term 'families' often used. The funders developed an initial Voice Strategy in April 2022 to set out how the voice of families was intended to drive the work and help to influence change.²¹

Despite the primary focus on parents and carers, at an individual level through the work of the coordinator and in an indirect way, there had been important insights about children's lives and parents themselves have sometimes been surprised:

"Several parents took the opportunity to ask their children what they would like and were often surprised by their ideas. Their decisions about what to ask for were taken with their children in mind, for example, creating a better home environment, or as a direct result of a child's request for something that would have been a previously unachievable treat, such as going to the Zoo." (MIHF, internal report, April 2022)

Whilst WM2U has always been ultimately about children's lives and wellbeing, the absence of the direct voices of children and young people probably arises from the primary focus on parents in the community. It may also reflect the nature of the systems change approach which means there is no identifiable beneficiary group of children and young people that use a service, and the difficulties of engaging practitioners with clear space for action in relation to voice, as illustrated by the various efforts of this period.

²⁰ In East Ayrshire, all five ideas pitched secured a total of £31,300 worth of investment including £11,300 from East Ayrshire Council, and senior managers and partner organisations publicly supported the approach.

²¹ This is included in report 1. It was revised in January 2024 and September 2024 to reflect emerging learning.

3. Using learning to put values into action 2022

3.1 Establishing an Oversight and Enabling Board

After retirement of the original CEO, a new Chief Executive was in place from the end of 2020. In the circumstances of the pandemic, ad hoc meetings with senior leaders were facilitated by Columba 1400. In April 2022, the role of the Oversight and Enabling Board was revised to take on a strategic sponsorship remit reflecting the evolving understanding of WM2U as an approach to voice-led system change rather than a programme with a focus on children on the 'edge of care'.

The refreshed WM2U Oversight and Enabling Board drew together senior leaders from across the local authority, chaired by the Senior Nurse Manager Children's Service's East Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership. The remit of the group was to:

- Ensure WM2U can deliver on its vision and mission in East Ayrshire, enabling clarity, focus, strategic learning and oversight.
- Make decisions on the development and scaling of support which reflects the expressed needs of children, young people and families, including the deployment of key resources.
- Support the development of a WM2U learning community, promote a shared understanding of expectations about the measurement of long term and immediate impact and ensure that emerging learning informs the development of the work in real time.
- Create the conditions for deep collaboration and alignment with parallel/concurrent initiatives and programmes.
- Enable people at all levels to listen to children, young people and families and respond in a relational way that is supported by wider strategic priorities for the partnership.
- Utilise values-based leadership as a catalyst for change ensuring services are informed by the views and/or needs of children, young people and families in a way that is agile and responsive.

This group met between April 2022 and May 2023, with all but one meeting being online.

3.2 Shifting to support the implementation of HEART

Whilst feedback from successive VBLEs had been consistently positive, the commissioning of further VBLEs in East Ayrshire was paused at the end of 2021. The learning at that time pointed to the value of the 'safe place' of a VBLE for staff and of parent voice, to be able to be a catalyst for system change, but it was becoming clearer that each VBLE needed to be followed-on in some way, to produce the practical changes on the ground. Columba 1400 and the WM2U delivery team also felt that VBLEs would be most effective delivered face to face, rather than on-line.

In April 2022, the East Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership launched the Help Everyone at the Right Time (HEART) model. This was a development of the earlier

'Wellbeing Model' aimed to encourage closer working and enhance visibility in the community. HEART brought together a range of services for children and families (including social work, CAMHS, education, early years, school nursing, health visiting, Vibrant Communities, Allied Health Professionals) in multi-disciplinary teams linked to each education cluster.²²

In developing the HEART model, WM2U offered advice around adopting a relational approach and principles of a way of working to be more community focused, rather than service-led.

"We have worked closely alongside WM2U who are working with a group of parents in the Cumnock area and supporting them to use their direct lived experience to influence the direction of things are going. So, we have a group of people there that we can kind of call upon to draw upon their expertise from their own lives in order to tell us whether we're going the right way."
(HEART Programme Manager, 2022)

In August 2022, the WM2U coordinator and a small number of parents also supported the testing of a new resource 'Graithnock' that used composite family stories as a tool to support practitioners from different services, working together and thinking about how they can collaborate more effectively to respond to a family.

The focus of WM2U subsequently was support for the implementation of the HEART wellbeing model.

- In September 2022, the WM2U Oversight Board approved a joint proposal by the HEART programme lead and WM2U which sought to build on the alignment of purpose between the two approaches. A proposal to roll-out six place-based local cohorts, each based on an education cluster, between September 2022 and September 2023 was endorsed.
- This positioned WM2U as the means to support the implementation of the HEART model, with a VBLE as a starting point, sharing and creating a mutual expectation that participants would work together to put their values-into-action after the completion of the VBLE and build learning into that process to consolidate, sustain and widen the successes.
- This staged approach was an attempt to recognise the workforce and service implications of staff taking time out in this way. It was intended to create a careful staged approach to impact and scaling, building the capacity within the system to use WM2U as a 'way of working', supporting the diffusion of new practices, rather than a mandated roll out.

²² <https://transcripts.podcast.iriss.org.uk/transcript/heart-community-teams/>

The Cumnock area/Barony campus was proposed as a starting point, after which a review would be undertaken before moving on. The work already underway in this locality supported by the Corra Foundation and WM2U was felt to be a good basis on which to build, also reflecting parents' priorities to improve relationships between the school and community.

The Barony (HEART) VBLE brought fourteen practitioners and three parents together in a face-to-face setting in November-December 2022, with a reconnect session in January 2023. This became the last VBLE to be run in East Ayrshire; the outcomes and lessons of this experience are discussed more fully below.

3.3 The need to build on the shared VBLE as a catalyst for action

Convening a combined Barony cohort in East Ayrshire demonstrated the significance for parents and professionals of new relationships and connections. Participants had a chance to hear different points of view, reconnect with personal values and focus on 'what really matters'. New ways to share practical information and resources through social media were adopted by some of the group and this continues to be used.

For parents, the Barony HEART VBLE provided a new sense of possibilities, for themselves, their children, and the community and new perspectives on the role of professionals and services.

"I am excited about the possibilities and can't wait to get started. I understand there will be challenges, especially within staff teams. Culture is something that takes time to influence and change. But I have no hesitation in doing all I can to play a positive role, whatever that may look like or meanI am hopeful we can keep up the momentum. " (EA parent, 2022)

"I'm excited for the changes that's going to come. We will come up against some challenges, but we'll find a way to sort these together" (EA, parent 2022)

The sense of possibility and challenge was shared by practitioners:

"I'm excited to see where we go within the Barony community as we develop and connect with each other. The challenges will be commitment and time from others, also keeping the enthusiasm that I left the leadership experience with." (EA Practitioner, 2022)

There was goodwill amongst these parents and practitioners, and most were keen to develop their ideas but at the reconnect day in January 2023, the focus tended to be on barriers to change, and it was difficult to work out how best to proceed to influence the wider community team.

4. Developing understanding of the enablers and barriers to system change 2023

4.1 Learning about enablers and barriers

As learning partners, we conducted a fuller exploration of the enablers and barriers to change in February 2023, summarised in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: Enablers and Barriers to System Change (February 2023)

Enablers	Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Families being central to everything• Bonds, trust, connectedness, social glue, bumping into each other out and about• Practical help, especially £• Lack of formality, helps conversations• Contact amongst professionals• Naming what we're doing ('that's (not) very HEART')• Systems speaking to each other• Quick responses, recognising urgency• A good team• Less preciousness about who responds• More time to focus on fewer families	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personal and professional pressures, including cost of living crisis, job insecurity• Workload, restrictive job roles• Lack of autonomy/discretion to make decisions and fear of consequences of error• Too slow responses to families• Over ambitious plans• Lack of involvement of middle tier of management• Frustration at slow pace of change – disheartening• Slow formal processes and long timescales• Burnout – staff and volunteers• Red tape, IT access issues

Whilst the importance of voice-led change was understood and supported, there was nevertheless a sense of disempowerment, fear of consequences, and recognition of the need for senior leadership support to make any changes a reality.

"I would like to feel empowered to make some changes that need to be made without worrying about possible consequences.... what would make it easier would be good team who understand the reality and importance of what we are striving to do, and an understanding from 'above' as to the fact that changes are a necessity and not a choice. What would make it more difficult would be working within the confines of my job." (EA practitioner, 2023)

In the light of these perspectives, it was felt that gathering stories as evidence of what is possible would help to encourage others and demonstrate how change might begin to happen.

4.2 Sharing stories to generate insight and support learning and change

Since March 2023, stories of change have been collated by participants in the Barony Community Team VBLE.²³ These stories were a useful resource to elicit conversations about what is changing, what still needs to change and the part that each parent or practitioner might play in that change. A selection is included in Annex 2.

These stories were levelling and humanising, illustrative of small steps, offering important fresh insights about individual change as necessary first steps for any wider actions that might be possible pathways to system change.

“It had stuck in my mind that one of the parents at the recent values-based leadership experience had said ‘it’s the small things that make a difference’. I realised that we were asking too much of the mother. Every service had bombarded her with information all at once. I said, ‘I think we need to stop! We are giving you mountains to climb’ – and she said ‘yes, and I can’t even get out of bed’. So, I changed tack and instead I asked, ‘what can I do today?’” ... [now] she decides what’s important and we tackle it together, but she takes the lead.” (EA practitioner, 2023)

A selection was shared at a wider Barony Community Team meeting, in April 2023 at which around 30 people, both parents and professionals, were present. Participants in that meeting identified what they valued about the stories and what specific actions they felt were possible for themselves. Many of these elements related to the exercise of individual and professional agency, for example, taking time to build relationships for more meaningful conversations, and listening and asking, rather than reacting to crises. Participants identified a range of enablers and barriers to translate these insights and small changes into wider practice, like those in Figure 4.1.

This exercise was a small agenda item at one of the earliest the Barony HEART Community Teams meetings. Given the approach to convening and managing these meetings, it was not possible to repeat it or develop the ideas that emerged beyond the people already connected to the work through their participation in the Barony VBLE.

“... The acoustics in the room were terrible and we were all sat around in a big circle. We said we wanted to get to know each other, but we weren’t actually doing that. ... The clock was ticking – we didn’t have much time to share our stories, but then someone asked if there were any questions and a few people started making speeches, using it as a chance to vent a bit. I didn’t

²³ This is a continuous process of story gathering. The East Ayrshire stories were also shared along with some from Dundee at the national event “Conversations About Our Learning on System Change” in May 2023.

disagree with what they said, but it really wasn't great. Now we had even less time to share." (LP reflections, 2023)

These difficulties highlighted questions about purpose and alignment between WM2U and HEART, forms of engagement with both parents and staff, and local authority forms of governance and meeting structures.

4.3 Hearing the voice of children and young people

In a community research discussion with East Ayrshire parents in June 2023, they acknowledged the risk that the focus of WM2U on parents and carers may obscure important distinctions of perspective, and that family life is not always benign for children. They were very alive to this issue, suggesting that 'it is naive to think a child's voice is not in the room when a care giver is present.' Around that time, some parents had attended the Hackathon and felt that the messages from young people about school life accorded with their own sense of the need for support and the development of life skills.

Discussion amongst the funders led to the revised voice strategy more explicitly naming the intention to record children and young people's expectations, thoughts and solutions and share these appropriately with key influencers to achieve systemic change. The revised strategy suggests that these insights are likely to be best achieved by using the influence of WM2U to encourage adults that work with children and young people to ask them what matters to them, and to share that information with key influencers such as other parents, practitioners, local authorities, funders, and decision-makers.²⁴

4.4 The Hope-Hack (Hackathon)

The "Hope-Hack" (Hackathon) was a full-day, large-scale event for young people held in June 2023 at Ayrshire College in Kilmarnock, attended by over 100 young people from across East Ayrshire.²⁵ Facilitators were drawn from a wide range of organisations that work locally with young people.²⁶

There were many professional benefits for facilitators including new connections and understandings amongst and between the adults and young people, as well as lessons for the wider professional practices of those involved in facilitation.²⁷ In terms of next steps, the young people themselves wished to decide their priorities and consider how they wish

²⁴ The voice strategy has been revised again since that time and is included in Report 1.

²⁵ Designed by the Hope Collective with the support of East Ayrshire Council and What Matters to You, this was part of a UK-wide series of events to bring together young people from the most vulnerable communities with cross-sector leaders and decision-makers to explore and develop innovative solutions to societal challenges.

²⁶ including What Matters to You, Columba 1400, East Ayrshire Council, East Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership, NHS Ayrshire and Arran, The Nest Wellbeing Group, Corra Foundation and Young Enterprise Scotland. Those involved had dedicated facilitation, community work and participation roles, or were employed in Allied Health Professions, social work, youth work and school nursing.

²⁷ <https://wm2u.co.uk/resource/what-would-young-people-adults-know>

to share their insights and ideas. This was to be taken forward by the East Ayrshire Promise team, WM2U, Vibrant Communities and Columba 1400.

This was a limited demonstration of how engagement with young people at scale can be achieved and of the wider benefits for young people themselves of bringing them together with others. It was valuable for facilitators to hear the voices of young people, their specific ideas and insight into how these might challenge the expectations and assumptions of adults. They were reminded of the value of not imposing adult views, worries or preconceptions onto children and young people.

Facilitators also benefited from meeting each other, the chance to connect informally with senior leaders and their own confidence in 'hosting' conversations with and amongst young people, including the value of listening, the specifics of language and the importance of visual facilitation to demonstrate that the messages were being heard.

This was not designed to be a one-off event. Although the event generated a strong interest in and feeling of responsibility for what could happen next and a desire to see tangible follow-up action, shaped by young people, this has still not come to fruition (September 2024), frustrated by lack of agreement amongst senior leaders about the best mechanism to take the ideas forward and loss of key staff.

This experience demonstrates the benefits and risks of consultative events, however successful in their own right. This work showed promise, but the potential for greater systemic impact and alignment to other developments around youth voice has not been explored. Active and collaborative leadership is needed to move beyond the limitations of individual consultation events. This experience illustrates how the viability of the WM2U voice strategy will depend on the opportunities for WM2U to engage closely with an appropriate group of senior leaders and practitioners, open to this influence on their practice and with the skills, permissions and opportunities to engage with children in this way.

5. Our learning framework: constructing a joint held ambition based on shared values

5.1 Agreement about outcomes and leading indicators

The East Ayrshire Learning Framework was completed in July 2023 reflecting agreement about the importance of the five WM2U high-level outcomes and the inter-connectedness between them.²⁸

The framework puts the empirical focus on seeking evidence of enablers, of what is being created, and what we want to see more of, rather than what has been prevented. The overall ambition for WM2U is framed in terms of five population-level outcomes:

- 1) A positive difference on the ground
- 2) Better mental health for children and families
- 3) Real supportive support at the right time
- 4) A sense of looking towards a positive future
- 5) A sense of belonging to a valued group, feeling that you matter and are valued within it.

Each of the three groups of local stakeholders has their own set of adjacent 'leading indicators' which they would expect to be able to see from their own perspective.²⁹ Figure 5.1 shows that these point to signs of emergent and systemic change, shifts in the mindsets, practices, and behaviours that are often taken for granted, unexplored or unnoticed, including the development of trust, safety, mutual understanding and a willingness to work together. Such qualities are often dismissed as intangible: bringing them to light in this way makes the changes we want to see and how to work together much more visible and discussable. Whilst each is framed slightly differently, they broadly cover the following elements:

- The development of safe environments in which people feel welcome and heard.
- The ability of all the stakeholders to work alongside others in the community and amongst different professional groups.
- The recognition of achievements and learning together.
- Confidence in strengths and roles.
- Developing trust, recognition of contributions.
- Willingness to test out new approaches and learn from what is working well and what might be adopted, adapted, or abandoned.

Such relational practices recognise the systemic nature of the issues that a family might face and enable families and practitioners to explore the difficulties and possible responses

²⁸ Fuller details are in report 1 and the full learning framework is included in section 8.

²⁹ After initial work with senior leaders in 2022, their indicators were revised and agreed in May 2023, as the final piece of the framework.

in that light, creating possibilities for more co-productive solutions. The indicators for the senior leaders reflect their strategic and operational interests to support practitioners and create the strategic conditions for change to become embedded.

Figure 5.1: East Ayrshire Leading Indicators

LEADING INDICATORS		
Parents and carers	Practitioners	Local Strategic Leaders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) We feel heard, safe to speak up and disagree, and are good listeners ourselves. b) We don't lose sight of what we have achieved so far and continue to learn together. c) We are confident of our strengths and role as a group. d) We are trusted by others to support change for all children and young people not just our own or those we know. e) There is recognition of our interests and potential contributions to the life of the school and community. f) We are working alongside those in schools and in the community that share our vision and want to make it happen. g) School staff and other professionals feel welcome at our meetings and in our spaces. h) We are engaged in and contribute to the learning from what is working well and what we should adopt, adapt, or abandon. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) We feel heard, safe to speak up, and combine our expertise with humble listening. b) We work alongside parents and carers that share our vision and want to make it happen, seeking out their contributions to the wellbeing of the community. c) We know and value practitioners from other services and are confident to raise issues and share information with them. d) We feel welcome at community meetings and spaces. e) We don't lose sight of our achievements and strengths so far and continue to learn together and with parents. f) We are flexible & responsive to the needs of people in communities, seek out possibilities, whilst honest about the realities and the limitations of our roles and responses. g) We feel more able to act in ways that feel right, can use relationships amongst us to support change and take actions ourselves and with others that feel more inclusive and collaborative. h) We are engaged in and contribute to the learning from what is working well and what we should adopt, adapt, or abandon. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) As Community Teams develop their approach, they include families and children in designing the support at the point of need. b) As leaders, we guide service responses in harmony with individual and community strengths and in ways that establish, restore, and maintain trust. c) As leaders, we seek to understand enablers and address barriers to change. d) Where changes are complex, we work together to develop plans to make changes over time and advocate for change with those who have decision making power. e) We develop the use of data about the whole population of children to support and demonstrate the shift of resources to prevention. f) The experience of families and children continues to contribute to staff learning and practice development. g) We are engaged in and contribute to the learning from what is working well and what we should adopt, adapt, or abandon.

5.2 Developing the use of data about the whole population of children

The development of the modelling element of the learning partner work has been an important way to support both practitioner and senior leaders contributions to learning, including agreement about the indicators in the learning framework. It has led to the specific ambition for senior leaders to develop the use of data about the whole population of children to support and demonstrate the shift of resources to prevention and remains relevant to the future direction and evaluation of early intervention and prevention in East Ayrshire.

This element of the WM2U work has proceeded slowly between 2019 and 2024, reflecting the need for strategic support and active engagement at a time when other priorities and pressures have often taken precedence.³⁰ Ultimately this work has generated useful learning and on-going developments for East Ayrshire, described briefly here.

Local stakeholders were first introduced to the approach at a workshop in June 2019. This event included staff working directly with children and young people and a presentation by the local authority of data on ACEs, GIRFEC and Education. At that time, it felt that East Ayrshire was 'ripe for doing things differently' and a data request was issued in December 2019 to take the work forward. Subsequently, the WM2U Strategic Board supported the convening of a model building 'short-life' group. This included nine people from the HSCP and the local authority, along with members of the learning partner and WM2U delivery team. This group met three times online between September and November 2020 using the model as a visual, interactive tool to explore different pathways for children and young people:

"This really maps out the pathway and how complex it is. I have found it really interesting, and it has improved my understanding of the work."

"I'm making connections.....interactions happening right now with real people telling their stories. That's quite exciting. Usually, high-level strategic conversations can seem very disconnected. It's amazing to see how one is influencing the other – joining the dots."

"There's a massive ripple effect, which will go beyond what we can do with a project. Shifting our whole approach, we should see fewer people getting into crisis." (EA, modelling group, 2020)

This engagement later led to further development work with a smaller group of stakeholders and the adoption of an East Ayrshire version of "Connection Explorer" in

³⁰ This work in both local authorities is described in more detail in Report 4.

2021.³¹ This visually underlined a key aspiration of WM2U as being to reduce the numbers of children moving towards being in care and increase the numbers moving away from care or the edge of care, and the alignment of this ambition with the aims of GIRFEC and other programmes to support the wellbeing of children, young people and families.

In 2022, WM2U sought local authority held data on the distribution of children across the widely recognised four GIRFEC levels of intervention, as part of the search for a way to assess the impact of any intervention on the wellbeing of children and young people at a population level. Ultimately neither local authority with which WM2U has been engaged could provide this data. Additionally, they hold the data in different data sets operated by education, social work, and health. This strategic challenge, which is almost certainly shared by all Scottish Local Authorities, is discussed more fully in Report 4.

In East Ayrshire, with initial support from the WM2U delivery team and learning partner, the local authority has subsequently taken up the challenge to explore what it would take to be able to describe the population of children and young people in GIRFEC terms, exploring if and how linkages between datasets can be achieved. This was galvanised by the shared interests of staff engaged in The Promise, the HEART community team model and the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund, to support system change, a shift toward prevention and early intervention for children and families.

There are acknowledged technical and adaptive challenges to fully operationalising this ambition, which secured the sponsorship of the Chief Education Officer at the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership in February 2024. In March 2024, a joint meeting was held with Dundee that demonstrated the value of using a stock and flow analytical methodology to uncover insight and the scope to make better use of data to improve both planning and practice.

Reviewing this element of the work in 2024 illustrates that it has led to important unanticipated insights, including shining a light on the failure to embed GIRFEC and demonstrating the importance of data to support improvement.

"[It's shown the importance of] getting an understanding of exactly what is happening in terms of GIRFEC processes and where children and young people are at any point in time.... understanding better where we [should] put our support, because we don't have the data at the moment. Now we can see the benefit of getting that [data] so credit to WM2U for really sticking with it and pushing it because I can see that it's been difficult." (EA, SL, 2024)

An internal implementation group is taking this work forward in East Ayrshire. Our recent interviews demonstrate acknowledgement that there is a risk of 'drift' unless strategic oversight is engaged and active. Connections with Dundee and with the wider national data

³¹ Connection Explorer is a diagram of the system showing its different elements, using a four-category GIRFEC structure at the population level. See Report 4.

work of WM2U are expected to be maintained. This is a positive development, and we are hopeful that sharing these challenges and ambitions to make better use of data within and amongst local authorities will help to maintain momentum and generate recognition for the strategic and operational value of this work.

6. Learning together: creating the conditions for change, 2023

6.1 Creating the conditions for change: areas of progress

For those closely involved, June 2023 was an important moment in the work of WM2U in East Ayrshire with a growing momentum that called for shared values to be put into action. In 2023, we reported that there was real cause for celebration: at that time, there was progress in creating the conditions for change both at an individual and a systemic level. WM2U was facilitating spaces and places where parents and practitioners could come together, building on existing opportunities and providing new ones.³² The significance of this period is explored more fully in this section.

The completion of the learning framework provided the basis for discussions amongst the stakeholders about progress and prospects.³³ Our 2023 report highlighted six areas of progress:

- The agreement of a shared learning framework
- Practitioners and parents together: building on the VBLE experience to develop values-into-action
- Developing understanding of the enablers and barriers to system change
- Sharing stories to generate insight and support learning and change
- Practice learning: hearing the voice of children and young people
- Collective sensemaking – conversations about learning and change.

These are explored briefly as context for a discussion of outcomes in 2024 in sections 7 and 8.

6.2 Practising what we all preach

In June 2023 WM2U and the Nest Wellbeing Group co-hosted a local “Grow as We Go” learning event in June 2023. Five community researchers played an active part in the design and co-facilitation of this event. A selection of stories gathered from community members and practitioners were used to encourage reflection and dialogue, including some elicited through Photovoice by the community researchers. Their involvement and attention to the creation of friendly and safe atmosphere very much influenced the spirit of the day, making sure that everybody there was able to take part ‘as a human being’, not wearing official badges or lanyards and sharing experiences with each other on an equal and safe basis.³⁴

³² <https://wm2u.co.uk/resource/where-should-we-look-system-change>

³³ This has been used at two significant check-in points in summer 2023 and 2024.

³⁴ Five of the original community researchers subsequently met in June 2024 to undertake a reflective session looking at impact. Their perspectives on their own learning from being involved in this way are included in section 7.1

Almost 40 people attended the event held at Netherthird Community Centre. The participants were drawn from the local community and practitioners with a role in the locality, with a rough 50:50 split and including four of the (non-WM2U) professionals that were part of the most recent VBLE alongside parents.

In planning the event, the group of parents and community researchers were clear that:

“We want people to come who can and want to make change, including those who hold budgets and other resources”. (EA Community Researchers, 2023)

This was an important occasion as it allowed people to see and hear the collective passion and commitment to make a difference. There was a positive and challenging atmosphere in the room, a sense of a common agenda and shared hope that change is possible.³⁵ It seemed that mobilising voice and agency around agreed actions, with professionals alongside, could be a significant form of system change. The story gathering process initiated in early 2023 provided insights into how being alongside, listening to parents had influenced individual’s professional practices.

The recent experience of community members of being alongside some professionals gave them a growing confidence in their potential contribution to joint initiatives or ‘tests of change’. The key ingredients for voice-led system change were identified as:

- A willingness to work alongside others, bringing the best of community expertise and professional experience together.
- Recognising the knowledge, skills and resources that already exists in communities and can be further resourced.
- The importance of how people are ‘met’ with compassion and as equals, without judgement.
- Retaining a positive outlook, noticing the good, as a strengths and solution-focused approach, able to motivate and sustain participation.
- Doing what matters to the individual, listening and acting on what is heard, checking out and keeping the conversation going.
- Recognition of personal experience of trauma, how this manifests itself in daily life and inhibits help seeking behaviours.
- Measuring what matters. Acknowledging even apparently ‘small’ individual and collective achievements and successes, even if there is still some way to go.
- Expecting and not being stalled by setbacks and barriers to change.
- Putting money at the heart of the community.

³⁵ The two reports based on this event paint a mixed picture and offered a challenge to those interested in the realities of place-based system change <https://wm2u.co.uk/resource/practising-what-we-all-preach> and <https://wm2u.co.uk/resource/nutshell-are-we-making-difference>

At that time, parents and community members were clear that the existing system was not working for them. Community as a resource had been undervalued. Yet, the bringing together of parents and practitioners by WM2U, the consistent relational work of the local coordinator and the Corra Community Coordinator, and the VBLE experiences, all enabled people to learn much more about each other, and sharing of insights about what does work, and what still needed to change.

Annex 2 has several stories of practice shared by practitioners who were part of the Barony VBLE experience, alongside parents. They demonstrate the simplicity and importance of relational practices, that prioritise listening and meet people with curiosity, seeking to learn from them and work together in practical ways. Whilst modest, they illustrated the kinds of possibilities for change that can arise through greater connections between parents and practitioners.

There was goodwill amongst parents and practitioners to develop ideas further in the light of their learning at that time. Alongside this willingness, several challenges were identified.

- There was a keen awareness of the continuing, systemic barriers to change amongst all parties and frustration that the failure to act on repeated messages would risk 'people and good staff giving up in the face of inaction'.
- There was also awareness of the financial impact on services, the cost of crisis interventions, and the human consequences and harms that arise from a failure to act earlier.
- Workloads, a lack of autonomy or discretion to make decisions, fear of repercussions and the consequences of error were significant issues for practitioners.

The learning partner update report in August 2023 illustrated that several of the leading indicators were shifting in the desired direction and looking ahead beyond the summer of 2023, the prospects for place-based partnership were felt to be positive.³⁶

- The best prospects for the future were seen to lie in the collaboration of services and communities where the community is a clear and valued partner, able to draw on untapped resources to reach people, offering timely and 'real supportive support', and able to contribute to joint initiatives or 'tests of change'.
- It was acknowledged that the continuing work would need to confront the significant complexities of living with and responding to trauma, understanding and supporting recovery in non-judgemental ways, and addressing the impact of poverty.

The sense of hope co-existed with clear disappointment amongst community members at the absence of most of the key senior leaders and decision-makers, especially given the acknowledgement of the shared challenges. There was frustration that whilst change is possible and some staff 'are listening and doing things differently', the slow pace of

³⁶ <https://wm2u.co.uk/resource/where-should-we-look-system-change>

change, difficulties engaging with schools and with decision-makers risked derailing the progress that had been made.

Reflecting some of these challenges, a planned further VBLE for the Grange Cluster for partners with connections to CentreStage in Kilmarnock, in September-October 2023 did not go ahead and latterly, the focus of WM2U shifted to the area of Shortlees in Kilmarnock.

7. Leading indicators: emergent and essential change 2024

This section explores the signs of emergent and systemic change, shifts in the mindsets, practices, and behaviours that are seen as hard to measure, and often taken for granted, unexplored or unnoticed. It illuminates the enabling factors and barriers to change, structured around the leading indicators which provide a framing and language to talk about achievements, contributions and learning, shown in Figure 5.1. These leading indicators reflect:

- the foundational and shared interests between community members and practitioners in developing relationships that enable safety and trust, greater collaboration, recognition of strengths, achievements and contributions, and willingness to learn and adapt.
- the strategic and operational interests of senior leaders to build on those foundations, to support practitioners and create the strategic conditions for change to become embedded.

The achievement of outcomes is discussed in Section 8.

In reviewing progress, it is important to recognise the history of community-based activity and multiple personal and professional contributions as the basis on which WM2U supported developments have taken place.

7.1 Beyond Voice: enabling the agency of community members and local practitioners

All interview participants recognise the commitment and tenacity of WM2U and widely describe the practice of the local WM2U Coordinator as 'exemplary' and as making a fundamental contribution to the changes reported here.

The success of WM2U is seen in terms of the demonstration of the value of voice and the empowerment of a small group of parents in Cumnock and others with connections to the Barony Campus, with on-going ripple effects amongst a small number of practitioners.

"... WM2U is giving us a chance to speak to those who wouldn't normally have had a voice or felt they didn't have a voice. But it's given the courage and the ability to speak up to say, oh, actually, do you know what, you're not getting it right. And that's really tough for me and for my family." (EA, SL, 2024)

Creating safe spaces where trust can grow

It was in this context that the connections with WM2U were an important source of encouragement and further help from other organisations that could enable those involved in the community-led response to 'raise their game'.

"[WM2U] is a catalyst for relationships....I realised there's value in being seen, by both the community and organisations, it enables you to reach more people and do it better. There used to be a 'them and us' for a lot of people ... Now there's more of a bridge, there's less separation. There's something important and valid in accepting that support." (EA, NWBG, 2024)

In October 2019, a WM2U 'stories of the future' workshop of locally based practitioners and community members in Cumnock shared three strikingly similar ideas for some form of 'community hub' with a strong emphasis on being 'people first'. Subsequently, the initial ideas of a small group of parents for a community space 'for people to drop in that feels like they are popping into my living room', evolved into proposals for the creation of a community living room.³⁷

"The best form of medication for my depression is helping others to have a focus and is a distraction from the fight in my own head. Everyone has poor mental health, we need to help each other as a community and have a healthy mind, body and soul." (excerpt from Best Within, EA Parent, 2020)

In October 2021, the Corra Foundation and WM2U facilitated a session for parents in the community that identified space as a priority to create a sense of belonging for themselves and the community. It also identified that they wanted to form a group where they could lead on their own activities within the community. A group of parents and members of the wider community drafted a document to highlight their priorities and ideas for change that would offer greater support for local people.³⁸

In April 2022, a partnership was established by the Corra Foundation, CVO East Ayrshire and WM2U to enable the group to purchase a building space within Cumnock. The old bakehouse was identified for 'The Nest' (a name chosen by the parents and the community) and, with funding support from Scottish Government, purchased by CVO East Ayrshire on

³⁷ Initially called 'Best Within' this was further developed with the inspiration and support of #WeAreCamerados and received financial support in May 2022 as result of The Lens, where it was pitched as a 'safe space to go where parents are met by people who understand them'. The group of parents received further support from the Corra Foundation to test the idea within one local community centre in the area. <https://thenestwellbeinggroup.co.uk/>

³⁸ This became the Nest Wellbeing Group NWBG in September 2022, registered as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) in December 2022.

behalf of the partnership. The partnership agreement subsequently broke down, with CVO East Ayrshire retaining control of the building and running their own community consultation events in Cumnock in July 2023.³⁹

This was a significant setback for the NWBG but also an important part of their development as a group. The group subsequently had access to temporary premises within the Barrhill Community Centre which they developed into a welcoming space, used for a variety of NWBG activities including use by third sector organisations to meet with people in the community. The group have now moved to different temporary premises in Cumnock.⁴⁰



Photograph used with permission of the NWBG

Being a SCIO brings legal protections and funding opportunities, which put local activities on a firmer financial footing than ever before, with paid roles for two community members and a further staff appointment. Since that time, the Nest has evolved and grown, becoming a more viable and sustainable community-led, peer-support focused organisation.

³⁹ <https://cvoea.co.uk/> accessed 11/06/24 Both Corra and WM2U have supported this decision as being in the best interests of the NWBG, seeing it as offering the best chance of realising their vision. Corra have provided a fuller account of this aspect of the work here: <https://www.corra.scot/nest-wellbeing-group-update/>

⁴⁰ Longer term they will occupy premises leased from Cumnock Men's Shed group who have secured a 20-year lease for a building via Community Asset Transfer from East Ayrshire Council. <https://www.facebook.com/people/Cumnock-and-District-Mens-Shed/100070052149742/>

Creating welcoming spaces for people to come together

The Nest offer a range of activities for community members from several community spaces. It has become much more than the original vision for a community living room and now offers vital support for local people.⁴¹

"It's hard to categorise what The Nest does. We might do a funeral one week, fill in a form, help a Mum clean a cooker because she doesn't know how, to then getting a couch for the housing support team, to supporting a police officer the next, giving mindfulness techniques to a nursery teacher, to going to the mental health team.... I think we have made a massive difference, not only to community members, but also to people who are staff. It's for everybody." (EA, NWBG, 2024)

An important time and space for people to come together is the 'Breakfast Club' held on Wednesday mornings. A lot of different people find significant and sometimes unexpected value from attending this activity. Practitioners feel welcome and safe in this space, some are using the venue for their own activities and services and there are intangible benefits that result from better knowledge of each other and more positive relationships.

The Nest: Breakfast Club

They remember your face, your name, or what you have in your roll

It's pretty unstructured. You can get a bacon roll and have a chat. You might mention a wee difficulty you have in your life, just dipping your toe into the topic and someone might ask you a bit more about it. Conversations are quite natural you can join in, if you want. People are more inclined to get the help and support they need in this way, as it can be confusing to know who to contact.... There's no one type of person that goes. Recently we had a really great session about the menopause it was very funny - the idea came from a just a conversation that we had there one day that it would be good to know more about it. We just asked if we knew anyone that could do it, and it turned out there was a doctor that was very good. She was so funny you couldn't believe this woman was a doctor. We had a huge laugh. (Local Councillor)

You do feel welcome... And I think that welcome creates a safe space. Lots of people don't have family and friends or good associates – some people are wanting to rebuild their lives. We do go in uniform, but we take our body armour off. We do the quizzes ... We tell them things about ourselves. The information we get from there is vital. If we were just out and about people wouldn't open up to us in the same way. We've built up trust. People are starting to see we're doing a job. We're not all about locking folk up! Guys will tell you wee bits of information that we would never have got before. (Community Police Officer)

⁴¹ <https://thenestwellbeinggroup.co.uk/> and <https://wm2u.co.uk/our-video>

Everyone seems to want you to feel like you belong there are so many people from different walks of life. The people you would never expect to mix are somehow friends. In other places, including a place where I'm actually from, the reception wasn't always the most welcoming and it was an effort to get to know people, to not just be some random professional. (Third Sector Support Worker)

Usually at meetings you have to introduce yourself, you'll say, 'I'm so and so ...' and you'll tell people what your job is, but here it's really about who you are as a person. You just come as you are and join in. People are not there to judge. The Nest is attracting the right people. Folk like to have a meaning in life, to feel like the part of something. I hope it expands - there's a lot more people that could benefit from attending, from the community and people in professional roles. (Health Worker)

East Ayrshire is a friendly and welcoming place, but there is something different about The Nest. There's a wide range of people there and they take the view that everybody can do something - people seem to take a lot of pleasure out of being part of it. I think what's also different is there's a willingness to challenge, in other community organisations people don't do that - there are boxes to tick, so it can be quite brave to challenge....What's been surprising is how genuinely open people can be without judgement - people have shared some raw and honest stuff with us, there's a degree of honesty that I do not experience elsewhere. People have opened up more quickly. New people are welcome too, it's not cliquy. I think a lot can be learned from The Nest and I would encourage other people to go along. (Third Sector Support Worker)

Working alongside to develop trust, connection and collaboration

The approach of WM2U and the Corra Foundation has reflected their commitment to community leadership and relational practice, to work 'alongside' to focus on amplifying local voices to build on their strengths, interests and aspirations.

WM2U has provided an important invitation and opportunity for further connections for the community and professionals. The work of the Coordinator, the VBLEs and practical developmental support from the Corra Foundation have helped to create the conditions and structures to enable voice and create change.

The VBLEs have been important to the NWBG in building relationships, firstly amongst themselves and subsequently with the professionals in the Barony VBLE.⁴²

"When we went to the second VBLE in 2022 where the professionals were also there it was a scary concept, we were dreading it, we didn't really understand the value of it, but we came away thinking 'OK there's people here that want the same thing as us.' ... it made me realise that these are also

⁴² A small number of parents attended a WM2U supported Columba 1400 VBLE in November 2019. Three of the most active parents subsequently attended a further VBLE experience alongside community-based professionals in November 2022.

people with their own values, trying to do the best they can, with what they've got. It's kind of changed things a wee bit ... we've realised there's a relationship with them first, that can be pulled on.....they're approachable."
(EA, NWBG, 2024)

WM2U has also been the umbrella under which the NWBG have been supported to be community researchers and to attend national events on system change in 2022 and 2023.

Greater recognition of strengths, achievements and contributions

The achievements of the Nest are based on their growing strengths as a group, bolstered by their ability to secure funding and access training opportunities. The strengths, interests and potential contributions to the life of the community are now more widely recognised and they are increasingly invited into new spaces.

"... They are truly inclusive. There is a lot of talk about inclusivity and values and a lot of it is just words - groups can often be cliquy. In The NEST you immediately feel part of the family - whether you're there because of addiction, loneliness, mental health issues, or because you just want a chat. Everybody is made welcome." (Local councillor, 2024)

This growing mutual confidence and knowledge give the NWBG a sense that they are increasingly being trusted by others to support change for all children and young people, not just their own or those they know.

"We've found allies in change amongst us. In the group we support each other, there are stronger relationships, and more people involved than a year ago. Trust is better. It's been highlighted, there's now more sharing and there is a better sense of belonging, it's like family. Collaboration amongst us is improving, we are helping each other more and different people are volunteering." (Community Researchers, 2024)

The NWBG members talk about having a greater sense of validity and credibility, which they attribute to the formalising of the status of two members as staff of a SCIO.

"We've seen changes in practice amongst the NHS, Housing, Neighbourhood Coaches, the police.... There have been some real wow moments. They've started asking us to things. They've changed how they speak to us."
(Community Researchers, 2024)

"I felt really privileged that they actually asked me along. There was a real separation at first. They didn't know why they'd been asked either. I was thinking 'this is not my world'. There was a panic. ...I told them why the Nest existed. I used language that was sometimes colourful!and they said 'aye, it is...' One of them took their badge off without me asking and put it in their pocket." (Community Researchers, 2024)

New funding and other resources have come to light: they have successfully raised funding from over ten different funders and feel that funders understand their approach better than before.

"Funders have shown an interest in us they've come out to meet us and supported us and they've made it much easier for us to apply for funds so for example we might have a conversation with them about what we're doing. ...that's influencing the way they fund." (Community Researchers, 2024)

Despite some pleasing developments and reversals in attitudes, there is still some resistance and entrenched views.

"...there are sometimes questions about whether we're qualified and at times it's hard not to take that personally. Some staff are suspicious, and they will place hurdles in your way. There is a real issue of power dynamics and how staff respond ... people do misunderstand The Nest. We don't deliver programmes." (Community Researchers, 2024)

There is less progress in relation to their potential contributions to the life of the schools. Within schools, there is awareness of the group and small signs of growing trust and interest from teachers, and this remains an important area that the group would like to develop.

Willingness to learn and adapt

The NWBG attribute their success in part to their willingness to learn.

"We've learned how to listen to each other, both amongst us and with others in the community. We are constantly learning.... We've learned not to let others make decisions for us, or to be rushed into making decisions without consultation." (Community Researchers, 2024)

Learning has been supported by the development of a shared understanding and language in the learning framework, and involvement as community researchers.

"The indicators have been really valuable - they give us a language that we can speak. I was at a meeting last week and they asked how to measure it! If we hadn't done that piece of work, I wouldn't have had a clue how to answer that and justify the work that we're doing. ...they said 'yes, but whose are they?'... I explained 'they're ours' and I said, 'actually staff and community indicators show that people want the same thing, expressed in different language'. ...I used it to remind them that we want the same things!"

(Community Researchers, 2024)

Feedback about the experience of community research suggests that it has been valued as a space for reflection and to build confidence and skills.

"I thought the community research was great it gave us all an insight to how things work, we had opportunities to show how things have progressed and how somethings haven't." (Community Researchers, 2024)

"I thought, when we started, that it wasn't anything that I didn't already do ...but it taught me different ways to start conversations and to be more curious....and to use different skills. I continue to use it to this day and in various settings... it's given me confidence as well, to not fill the silence."

(Community Researchers, 2024)

7.2 Enabling the agency of practitioners - perspectives from 2024

It is clear that there have been positive developments for some practitioners through their connections to the Nest, which has made them feel more welcome in community meetings and spaces. There are also good prospects for wider benefits, for example, through the continuing involvement of housing practitioners in a joint test of change initiative with the Nest.

For practitioners that had attended the shared VBLE alongside parents, there had been hopes that it would be possible to use this experience as a catalyst for action.⁴³ A small number of these practitioners and parents took part in an online survey in June 2024. The networks and connections established during the Barony VBLE remained significant. Both parents and professionals provided examples of how the connections from that time still enable mutual access to practical help, advice and resources.

⁴³ This is discussed in section 3 and 4.

“... Only last week one of the other participants came to me with an offer and that would never have happened if we had not connected through the course. These connections were enhanced by the week we shared together.” (EA, Practitioner, 2024)

“It has enabled relationships [with those] I might not had had the opportunity to meet. ...I can reach out to those individuals when situations have arisen within my role, such as asking for advice and vice versa, as they contact me.” (EA, Parent, 2024)

“I have built on relationships made and have worked with another agency together to support a really struggling family. ...Speaking to another professional opened my eyes to what her role is and the ways she can support.” (EA, Practitioner, 2024)

The principal way in which practitioners have been able to build on that experience and lead change in their role has been through retention of connections with the Nest, the Corra Foundation and other professionals.

This small group of practitioners see the value of and remain committed to a voice-led approach in their own practice but have not felt able to put it into action in ways or at the wider team or organisational scale that they had anticipated. The WM2U leading indicators for practitioners remain relevant as an aspiration, but progress has been very limited and fragmented, and practitioners have felt hindered by leadership and organisational barriers which they believe have failed to engage with the need for change or develop the strategic conditions that would enable it.

“We have consulted with organisations and communities for months and years with no clear strategy to implement change or achieve any change.” (EA, Practitioner, 2024)

Commenting on the present opportunities and challenges, the tone in 2024 is one of despondency, with some feeling that the pressures of ‘extra work’ on themselves are becoming too great.

“I think unfortunately we have made things worse; I think the changes in my own organisation has cost us valuable employees and money that didn't reach communities.... there is a negativity around HEART which is now difficult to change ...[and] a lack of trust from the community in services and organisations that we are able to listen and effect change.” (EA, Practitioner, 2024)

“Working in a school is very challenging at the moment given the budget constraints and supports available. We have to do more with less! ... the school is dealing with an awful lot, other agencies need to step up and not demand so much of our education system”. (EA, Practitioner, 2024)

The parents involved also recognise the shift in the context from early 2023.

“... it appears that staff weren't given the agency to make changes. Staff leading on this has changed, there's no momentum. It's disappointing after all the time that was invested in it.” (EA, parent 2024)

“Opportunities at the moment seem fewer than the challenges currently involved... For all the opportunities are more scarce or seem that way at least, we can't give up on bringing about the changes needed.” (EA, parent 2024)

The barriers to change identified by practitioners and parents in 2023 and indicated in Figure 4.1 remain stubborn and continue to include:

- Personal and professional pressures, including the cost-of-living crisis, job insecurity, workload, restrictive job roles, burn out and loss of staff
- Lack of autonomy/discretion to make decisions and fear of consequences of error
- Too slow responses to families
- Over ambitious plans and frustration at slow pace of change
- Lack of involvement of middle tier of management and wider teams
- Slow formal processes, 'red tape' and long timescales.

7.3 Leadership: creating the strategic conditions for change

Drawing on recent interviews with senior leaders, the learning from the work to date is felt to be valuable and transferable with hope expressed that it can be taken forward in Shortlees and other parts of East Ayrshire.⁴⁴ The tone of the interviews was reflective and candid, reflecting the realities of recent activity, acknowledgement of the relative lack of progress and individual decisions to leave.

All of those interviewed with experience of the WM2U Strategic or Oversight Board had been on the initial three-day residential VBLE that took place in the winter of 2019.

⁴⁴ This section is based on an analysis of interviews undertaken between May – July 2024 with five key stakeholders from East Ayrshire. This was supplemented with an interview with the current Columba 1400 facilitator. Four of the East Ayrshire stakeholders had been or were members of the WM2U Oversight Board and one was the lead officer for HEART. Three of the five interviewees had or subsequently announced their retirement or departure for other jobs. The interviews were completed before the WM2U funders decision to cease funding WM2U in East Ayrshire on 4th September 2024.

“It certainly made us think a wee bit differently, but it also showed that we all wanted the same thing for children and young people, which was really valuable. We did really have a feeling of collaboration, of being able to work together and also challenge one another.” (EA, SL 2024)

There had been a shared willingness to be part of WM2U, to create together what that might mean. Of the original twelve participants, five went on to form the WM2U Oversight Board with an additional senior leader from health.

Understanding community strengths and contributions

There is agreement that the outcomes articulated in the learning framework remain the right ones, that WM2U is going in the right direction in terms of building trust, working with parents to look at needs through the lens of community. It is undoubtedly the case that the senior leaders had hoped to be in a better place at this time.

“[The WM2U] outcomes are robust and challenging and if we achieve them, [they] would support the shift of resource that we’ve talked about.” (EA, SL, 2024)

Whilst there has been very limited engagement by the participants with the group of parents and the community in Cumnock that WM2U had been working with directly, where there has been some contact this was felt to be valuable.

“The national event [Sept 2022] was probably the first time that I saw and heard a group of parents that WM2U had been working with ... for me that made it come to life...I'd read the stories... but it was good to be in the room with parents, to listen to their experiences and also their input on what they think needed to change and how we could move forward.” (EA, Senior Leader, 2024)

The Lens experience at which parents pitched their ideas helped some senior leaders to understand what parents could offer.⁴⁵

“.....they were coming up with their own ideas. And it was like the creativity, the ideas that they had. ...And you're sitting there thinking, do you know what?”

⁴⁵ In December 2021, WM2U commissioned The Lens, an organisation which specialises in supporting ‘intrapreneurs’, to set up and deliver a programme in each area to move ideas into action. This is described in Report 1.

That's a fabulous idea. And if that works, then we get that right, then that would be amazing.” (EA, SL, 2024)

Some now see potential to work with parents on a more routine basis, to build on the success of ‘following the parents’, bringing community groups together, and developing a peer-to-peer model of support.

“There is scope for doing so much more with parents rather than seeing them as a noise, nuisance, or not representative we scurry about trying to do something, whereas actually these parents would give us the answers, but they just need guided and supported about the art of the possible, because we don't have limitless money.” (EA, SL, 2024)

The commitment and tenacity of WM2U is widely remarked upon, yet for some, whilst promising in many respects, there is a perception that the direct impact on the ground is confined to a relatively small group of parents and the challenges of ‘going to scale’ remain.

“The Nest is a really good start in place...but it's only a good start in place, if you're able to evidence what was achieved in a way that allows you to inform what your next steps are, and that people are listening to that.” (EA, SL, 2024)

There is no shared idea amongst senior leaders about any route to scale, with one stakeholder articulating a continuing expectation to be able to quantify the impact of WM2U as a programme by seeing a direct impact on a number of identifiable children and families.

“...you need a bit of a leap of faith ...but you can't always leap for faith, you need to have something land solid. And I think I haven't quite found where it's landed that is solid.” (EA, SL, 2024)

Whilst senior leaders detect no discernible shifts in power, they see the demonstration of WM2U as highlighting the potential for it, for example, in a shift of mindset in relation to the fear of being criticised or raising expectations:

“I think my biggest surprise is they're not critical. The families want to work with us and come up with their own solutions and maybe for us to support that possibility and make it real for them. That was my biggest thing because I think if we ask, ‘how can we help today?’ ... I think there's this fear that, ‘oh

my goodness, we're never going to be able to cope with the needs.” (EA, SL, 2024)

Such fleeting insights and awareness of underlying assumptions and anxieties illustrate a lost opportunity to enact fresh thinking: an absence of collaboration, candour and trust meant that such insights have not been shared and explored by the senior leaders as a group and so any potential for wider, systemic impact has been lost.

Including families and children in designing support

Children and young people’s voice are seen as important by funders, senior leaders, practitioners and parents, but the inclusion of either children or families in designing support or contribution to staff learning and development remains an aspiration for senior leaders.

The importance of children’s voice is now brought more sharply into focus with the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024. The provisions of this Act provide important protection for the human rights of children and young people in Scotland, intended to further a culture of everyday accountability for children’s rights.

“It is important that children and young people get a voice through various channels also in schools. We're doing loads of work ...but there aren't enough advocates for children and young people, and we're see far more need for advocates. Being able to hear the voice of children and young people more is an important area moving forward.” (EA, SL, 2024)

This is a complex issue and in part highlights the difficulties of embedding Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and the part played by education as a universal service.⁴⁶

“... we all talk the talk, the GIRFEC talk. We talk about our Quality Indicators, the Wellbeing assessments and things like that. And actually...did we get a child's plan, right? ...One mum I have spoken to and asked what happened to you? How come your children were removed? and she said, 'I didn't even understand what my plan meant and apparently I wasn't meeting my plan’”.
(EA, SL, 2024)

⁴⁶ GIRFEC is the Scottish Government’s commitment to provide all children, young people and their families with the right support at the right time to enable them to reach their full potential
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/getting-right-child-girfec-policy-statement/>

There is a still to be realised opportunity to generate wider influence to change mindsets, cultures, and everyday practices in relation to the voice and agency of children and young people across services and communities. The WM2U Voice Strategy notes that 'tokenism, coercion, manipulation, and decoration are ethical risks'. Putting this strategy into practice must yet confront the contradictions, compromises and tensions between the commitments and duties of professionals, the lived expertise of parents and the rights of children. All these adults have traditionally held power of some form in decision-making in the lives of children.

Many adults want to be advocates for children. The scope to engage more fully with children and young people is not solely an issue of skills and capacities; professionals need support to avoid formulaic or tokenistic approaches that risk maintaining or reinforcing the existing structural inequalities affecting children and families, rather than realising true systemic change.

8. What outcomes have been achieved? 2024

Section 7 shows that there is encouraging progress in relation to the leading indicators for parents and community members.

“A power shift is happening – we are making the right people uncomfortable - the community is realising they have power of their own.” (EA parent, 2023)

Despite important community-led developments, everyone involved had hoped for greater impact. The full learning framework is included in Figure 8.1. This section provides an overview of the impact and summary of the outcomes that have been achieved by summer 2024, drawing on data from a range of stakeholders from that time and earlier reports.⁴⁷

8.1 Overview of impact

There is agreement across all stakeholders about the importance of all five WM2U high-level outcomes and understanding of the part that each play in contributing to achieving impact. Whilst the challenges of ‘going to scale’ remain, in terms of the desired outcomes, it is now clear that important achievements are:

- 1) **A positive difference on the ground:** The Nest Wellbeing Group (NWBG) are now a constituted community-led charity, at the forefront of developing a range of health, wellbeing and social activities in Cumnock. WM2U connections and continuing help from the Corra Foundation have enabled the expansion of community-led support and the consequent formation of the NWBG. Building on existing activity and support from partners, this is a significant part of the legacy of WM2U in East Ayrshire, with scope to enhance voice and deepen and extend the possibilities for wider system change.
- 2) **A sense of belonging to a valued group, feeling that you matter and are valued within it:** the Nest provides a sense of belonging. Community members have spaces and occasions to get to know each other in new ways. Practitioners feel welcome and safe in these spaces too, with impacts on the professional practices of some individuals. The interests and potential contributions of The Nest to the life of the community are becoming more widely recognised, they have a greater sense of validity and credibility as a SCIO and there are more opportunities for them to contribute to the work of wider partners, forging connections some local practitioners and with funders and other partners, including the NHS and the Health and Social Care Partnership.

⁴⁷ It draws on additional fieldwork undertaken with parents, practitioners and senior leaders.

3) **Real supportive support:** The Nest is a small-scale, concrete demonstration of community-led 'real supportive support'. Small, yet significant changes illustrate the unique value of community-led and peer support. Examples include many ways of helping people to reclaim a sense of control over their own lives and create safer environments for themselves, perhaps taking the first steps out of the house, building friendships and wider connections, learning to trust others and feeling able to ask for help, wanting to play a more active role in supporting other people, and finding trusted people that can vouch for and help to access wider services. Supportive support also encompasses the provision of practical help, advice and access to resources for practitioners.

4) **Better mental health for children and families:** the shared commitment to address mental health is a community priority and a galvanising force. In 2023, parents suggested there were positive signs of progress, a better awareness and understanding about what is needed in the community and the part that parents can play.⁴⁸ By 2024, the Nest have prioritised opportunities and sought resources for training, much of which has been related to issues of mental health and wellbeing, including children and young people's mental health, positive parenting and wellbeing activities. Wider trends are not encouraging and there remain issues of stigma, a lack of understanding about trauma and recovery, and deaths from suicide and drugs.

5) **A sense of looking towards a positive future:** the growth of safety and trust has encouraged growing individual and collective agency amongst community members, often built despite considerable personal hardship and trauma. The achievements of the Nest are based on their growing strengths as a group, greater trust and a sense that 'lived experience is getting a hearing', with some professionals doing some small, but significant things differently. Their focus and willingness to learn gives them a fairly sanguine and pragmatic attitude towards the future and a confidence that, given their experience, they will be able to face any further setbacks.

WM2U is not a conventional programme or intervention, but an approach that depends for impact on how it contributes to the emergence of more relational and systemic practices amongst all the different stakeholders, as necessary conditions for achieving system change at scale.

Whilst there is now greater credibility and growing trust, the part that community can play as a resource has been and continues to be undervalued, too readily dismissed as small-scale, or insignificant and not understood in terms of the wider relevance and potential.

An important lesson is that a relational and systemic approach takes sustained effort, honesty, humility and a willingness to compromise. This has proved to be a significant challenge to the prevailing organisational and leadership cultures and approaches.

⁴⁸ <https://wm2u.co.uk/resource/practising-what-we-all-preach>

Prospects do not feel promising to local practitioners and there is uncertainty around the future of the HEART model. Some practitioners have benefited from the new connections they forged, and community members have valued improvements in practice, but individual insights have not translated into wider team or organisational learning. This creates disappointment, frustration, loss of valuable staff and resources.

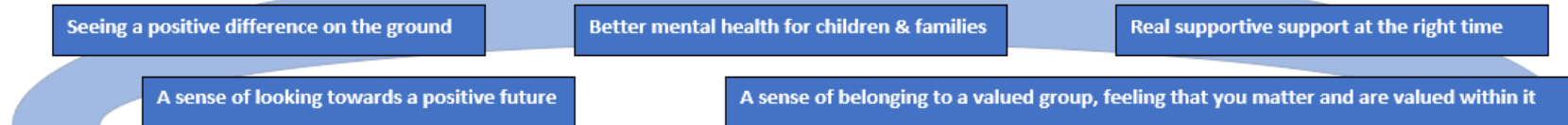
- Policy aspirations and individual motivations to work differently have not been translated into wider actions and practices. The gap between positive aspirations and connection with shared values, and changing mindsets, cultures, and everyday practices remain.
- Practitioners who have been part of WM2U have a desire to work differently and sometimes are able to do so, whilst also being keenly aware of the pressures and frustrations of their own job roles and contexts. Their insights and practices have not translated into wider team or organisational learning.
- Senior leaders have not had a collective voice or collaborated well together in practice. Despite shared ambitions to create positive outcomes for children and young people, the relationships, priorities and different leadership styles amongst senior leaders meant that they did not collaborate well amongst themselves or with WM2U to meet those aspirations.

For all, this work continues to confront the significant complexities of living with and responding to trauma, understanding and supporting recovery in non-judgemental ways and addressing the impact of poverty. The continuing challenging context of austerity for families, the tail-end of the Covid-19 pandemic and recovery from it, restrictive spending by public services, and changes in key personnel, further highlights significant challenges to make the fullest expression of these common purposes a reality.

Figure 8.1: East Ayrshire WM2U Learning Framework



SHARED OUTCOMES AND INDICATORS: EAST AYRSHIRE (July 2023)



PROGRAMME BOARD STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND INDICATORS			
<p>SO1: Create conditions and structures that sustain change by working alongside families to co-produce new ways of operating</p> <p>a) Families have voice & agency and are at the heart of change for themselves and others. b) The contribution & achievements of families, communities & local decision makers are visible to them & others. c) Families, communities, and decision makers pay attention to learning to sustain continuous change.</p>	<p>SO2: Scale a WM2U approach deeply across both Local Authority areas.</p> <p>d) Those working alongside families put their voice at the heart of their work, have new insights about what matters to families and express confidence in applying these in their day-to-day work. e) The degree of scaling is seen through a combination of changes in the embedded cultural values and beliefs experienced within the system; changes in formal organisational policies, protocols, and structures; and increasing numbers of people engaging in this approach.</p>	<p>SO3: By listening to the voices of children and families Public Services will increase investment in prevention and enable children to flourish within their own families</p> <p>f) Public service leaders have shifted resources and focus to offer support earlier, enabling children to flourish within their own families. g) Local authorities and their partners can use data to measure the shift to prevention & identify how they reduce the number of children who <u>are care</u> experienced or in formal measures, such as their Child Protection Register.</p>	<p>SO4: Our influencing strategy achieves a redesign of children's services locally & contributes to how national policy is implemented and practice is shaped nationally</p> <p>h) Genuine voice-led policy and practice is visible, experienced, and contributing to local, redesigned children's services. i) Learning influences understanding of how voice can be mobilised to influence the design and implementation of national policies.</p>
LEADING INDICATORS			
Parents and carers	Practitioners	Local Strategic Leaders	
<p>a) We feel heard, safe to speak up and disagree, and are good listeners ourselves. b) We don't lose sight of what we have achieved so far and continue to learn together. c) We are confident of our strengths and role as a group. d) We are trusted by others to support change for all children and young people not just our own or those we know. e) There is recognition of our interests and potential contributions to the life of the school and community. f) We are working alongside those in schools and in the community that share our vision and want to make it happen. g) School staff and other professionals feel welcome at our meetings and in our spaces. h) We are engaged in and contribute to the learning from what is working well and what we should adopt, adapt, or abandon.</p>	<p>a) We feel heard, safe to speak up, and combine our expertise with humble listening. b) We work alongside parents and carers that share our vision and want to make it happen, seeking out their contributions to the wellbeing of the community. c) We know and value practitioners from other services and are confident to raise issues and share information with them. d) We feel welcome at community meetings and spaces. e) We don't lose sight of our achievements and strengths so far and continue to learn together and with parents. f) We are flexible & responsive to the needs of people in communities, seek out possibilities, whilst honest about the realities and the limitations of our roles and responses. g) We feel more able to act in ways that feel right, can use relationships amongst us to support change and take actions ourselves and with others that feel more inclusive and collaborative. h) We are engaged in and contribute to the learning from what is working well and what we should adopt, adapt, or abandon.</p>	<p>a) As Community Teams develop their approach, they include families and children in designing the support at the point of need. b) As leaders, we guide service responses in harmony with individual and community strengths and in ways that establish, restore, and maintain trust. c) As leaders, we seek to understand enablers and address barriers to change. d) Where changes are complex, we work together to develop plans to make changes over time and advocate for change with those who have decision making power. e) We develop the use of data about the whole population of children to support and demonstrate the shift of resources to prevention. f) The experience of families and children continues to contribute to staff learning and practice development. g) We are engaged in and contribute to the learning from what is working well and what we should adopt, adapt, or abandon.</p>	

9. Conclusions and implications for East Ayrshire 2024

The interviews for this report have been an opportunity to take stock. In East Ayrshire, there is agreement about the importance of the overall ambitions for early intervention and preventative approaches for children and families as articulated by the WM2U Learning Framework. The underlying ‘theory of change’ of voice-led place-based system change and the wider ambitions for public service reform expressed by the Christie Commission are all still resonant, the latter recognised in the East Ayrshire Review of Children’s Services (June 2024).

- Despite positive community-led developments, highly valued by the community and some professionals, overall impact is limited. The early promise of collaborative leadership was not sustained.
- Efforts to align WM2U with the East Ayrshire HEART model, highlights the need to translate the ambitions of such programmes in ways that enable practitioners to understand and enact their role in the implementation of change.

9.1 Learning about enablers and barriers to change

There are important lessons about implementation. Practitioners need support to enable them to understand and enact what is being asked of them, with active support and leadership to enable the sharing of insights about effective practices and learning how to navigate and dismantle the barriers to change. This requires close attention to what policy commitments will mean for staff, appropriate forms of engagement with both community members and staff, and attention to forms of governance and meeting structures.

The senior leaders broadly characterise WM2U as a ‘wake-up call’, perhaps one that’s only now being heard.

“WM2U has not been understood for what it could have been. This is a way to do it, to make Christie come alive. It became a sideshow rather than the main act, which it actually deserved to have been.” (EA, SL, 2024)

“I think it's been a realisation that actually we're just continually doing more of the same, and we're not seeing progress.” (EA, SL, 2024)

Whilst senior leaders each have a different emphasis, their perspectives highlight:

- The gap between positive aspirations and implementation on the ground, with the acknowledgement that apparent ‘permissions’ given to work differently from senior level have not been translated into actions and practices, with acknowledgement that this is not unique to WM2U.
- The challenges of operating in a ‘muddy’ or ‘cluttered landscape’, with ‘too many action plans, that are not followed through’, a lot of ‘background noise’ and the

dominance of other, and often shifting priorities and demands, including those of the Scottish Government.

- Continuing siloed working and working practices that were a feature of the pandemic. There have been too many and ineffective meetings, the absence of face-to-face meetings, conflict avoidance and duplication of effort amongst the Oversight Board members. This creates disillusionment and absence and cultivates a negative culture of blaming of others.
- In practice, WM2U was seen as a 'distraction' or 'an extra thing to do' rather than as a means to deliver their core mission or the aims of public service reform. The WM2U Oversight Board became one more meeting amongst many others.
- The failure of leaders, funders and the third sector interface to collaborate well had practical consequences, particularly for the Nest group in relation to the loss of their premises.
- Tensions within and between the local authority and the HSCP over the HEART model have seen the effective abandonment of the HEART approach, with which WM2U had aligned.

This situation and the prevailing group dynamics seems to have made it difficult for individual members to challenge on issues where they felt there was not transparency, for example, there have been very different perspectives at play amongst the Oversight Board members and between the Oversight Board, WM2U delivery team and learning partners. These include very different ideas about the purpose of WM2U and how to scale it, the nature of system change, understandings of early help or prevention, the role of the community and the nature of participation and use of funding. Yet, there was little open disagreement within the group and in interviews in 2024, a frank admission that any challenge to the Oversight Board would have been met by 'defensiveness'.

In this climate, the willingness on all parts to avoid confronting differences of view within meetings, failure to address underlying dissatisfaction and create a basis for trust and shared endeavour all contributed to the effective demise of the Oversight Board as a functioning group.

The Hunter Foundation, Columba 1400 and WM2U delivery team have sought to use their influence and relationships to challenge prevailing ideas and patterns of behaviour that have avoided confronting the realities now acknowledged more openly. With hindsight, it is unfortunate that the insights being shared, and degree of candour being shown by the individuals within the local authority and HSCP, have not been subjected to discussion in the Oversight Board, which has not met since May 2023. Given other developments, they are too late to enable the mutual understanding needed and any practical realisation of the original ambitions. These realities were recognised in summer 2023, when the funders began to consider whether to conclude their funding.

Reviewing the situation in 2024, for some senior leaders, the conditions are not there to enable the organisation to 'modernise', be 'more progressive' or bolder and WM2U feels like a lost opportunity or unfinished business:

“... if you provide communities with the skills and knowledge to have control over their own lives, then they're not going to need statutory services. ...So 'that money that was going into putting those kids into care, instead we're going to give it to the parents in those communities to support their communities'. Those conversations are not happening. That's the difference that WM2U should have [made].” (EA, SL, 2024)

The challenging local and national context in East Ayrshire was acknowledged by all the interviewees, with each choosing to identify the salience of different factors. They referred in different ways to many environmental and local factors at play. These include the impact of the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, continuing financial austerity in local government and the deterioration in the mental health of children and young people.

Other local factors that were also felt to have influenced the progress of WM2U included the loss of significant staff both in the earliest days, when there had been a change of Chief Executive and Head of the Barony Campus, and more recent departures of key people in senior leadership roles.

The co-existence of programmes with similar principles and approaches such as the Scottish Government Whole Family Wellbeing Fund (WFWF) and the attempt to align WM2U with the delivery of the HEART model brought further complexities, including inflexibility and failure to sufficiently recognise existing work, risking duplication and an inability to develop potential synergy between different programmes and approaches.

In discussing the enablers and barriers to change, these findings echo those of the East Ayrshire Review of Children's Services (June 2024) which recognised similar strategic challenges to those that WM2U has experienced. In October 2023, the local authority commissioned five time-limited, cross-cutting strategic reviews, including one on Children and Young People's Services. These reviews sought to mitigate service cuts that would impact on the community, through innovation in leadership and service delivery, the removal of duplication and identification of opportunities for improvement.⁴⁹

The Children's Service Review identified the need to improve collaborative leadership across and within the Council, highlighting themes around structures and governance, communication and data sharing, planning, budgets and decision making, engagement and participation, relationships and behaviours.

The reviews also highlight the wider social, economic, demographic and financial challenges for East Ayrshire, including poverty, health inequalities and an exponential increase in demand for a range of services, particularly in health and social care.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ <https://newsroom.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/news/council-reviews-pave-the-way-for-change>

⁵⁰ Selected statistics that give insight into the social conditions of the communities in which this work is taking place are included in Annex 1.

In recognition of these challenges, in February 2024 an East Ayrshire *Early Intervention and Prevention Fund* was established, setting aside £40 million over 10 years in support of change, early intervention and prevention and other initiatives aimed at supporting communities, tackling poverty and increasing fairness.

In concluding the reviews, the council propose that the Christie Report of 2011 remains the 'effective roadmap for public sector change' and express the desire to 'seek to reinvigorate the Christie Commission principles' to empower individuals and communities, to work more closely in partnership, prioritise expenditure on prevention, and become more efficient by removing duplication.

9.2 Final reflections and implications for system change

Our 2019 literature review highlighted the lesson of place-based systems change that 'building trust between different actors is hard, particularly when the cast keeps changing' and that whilst external resources and facilitation can create effective spaces for learning and dialogue, at some point, these spaces must become owned collectively by actors in the system.⁵¹

In concluding this discussion about progress in East Ayrshire this lesson is highly resonant: the challenges to senior leaders to engage with and contribute to learning, and the call to adapt will require a significant cultural and organisational shift. The absence of collective or collaborative leadership is significant. Despite shared high-level ambitions, there remain some very different understandings and priorities amongst the funders, WM2U delivery team and senior leaders.

The importance of relationships, collaboration and shared stewardship also form core themes in the Children's Services Review, encompassing trust, mutual respect and effective collaboration across agencies. This rather stark reality is acknowledged by senior leaders, and they express the hope that this juncture can be a moment of better mutual understanding and collaborative leadership to unlock the undoubted potential and commitment to change for children and families amongst practitioners, parents and senior leaders.⁵²

There is no lack of evidence; it points to the need to consider how strategic ambitions for change translate into change on the ground and that leaders with power to influence change need to be visibly involved and able to create the enabling conditions that allow for experimentation and the embedding of successful approaches.

The chance to explore meaning and language with each other in robust ways are also important to support real collaboration and influence the ability to engage with or deter people in the community and within organisations. Many of these issues are referenced in the recent Children's Services Review and in the WM2U literature and practice reviews and reports.

⁵¹ Lankelly Chase cited in <https://wm2u.co.uk/resource/brief-literature-review>

⁵² The implications and prospects for East Ayrshire are discussed in Section 7.

Many adults sincerely want to be 'advocates for children'. Workloads, a lack of autonomy, permission or discretion to make decisions, fear of repercussions and the consequences of error are significant issues for practitioners. Yet, the experience of WM2U shows both potential and pockets of significant strength in communities and amongst practitioners that could be built upon.

"Let's just ask, 'what's going to make the biggest difference?' and go with it, you know, be brave, go with it and just work with families to see. 'Right, we're going to try this for three months or four months or five – whatever'. Just so it's changing mindsets and how we address need." (EA, SL, 2024)

"Trust your instincts. If it doesn't feel right, it's probably not, relinquish power - drop your professional guard if you like. It's very different to go to a parent and say, 'I could do with your help'." (EA, SL, 2024)

"[My advice would be] where there are positive vibes and momentum jump on it sooner! As soon as you see something like that, rather than thinking about governance and oversight, what if there was an excitement meeting called because something had just been found that was in green shoots? Capture it!" (EA, SL, 2024)

Amongst senior leaders, it is felt that the value of getting out into the community to build relationships has been demonstrated by WM2U. More practitioners and senior leaders need to experience the warmth of welcome available in community spaces, to themselves become participants in community.

In terms of moving forward in a positive spirit, they propose:

- There is a need to create space to have conversations with families and amongst practitioners, teams and senior leaders to address some of the 'lower key challenges' of prevention or early intervention, where it may be possible to stop things escalating or support de-escalation.
- The urgency and scale of needs means there needs to be much more routine asking and listening, with ongoing relational interactions between practitioners and families that recognise 'prevention' as a dynamic, responsive process, rather than a reaction to a crisis or event.
- Different conversations with families can find the small things that will help in the view of the families themselves.
- There is also a need to recognise what support communities need so they can play an active and unique part and be resilient.
- This may need greater realism about community aspirations and capacities, and an understanding of optimal synergy between community-led and peer support and the specific needs that only commissioned or statutory services can address.

- A way forward would be to keep celebrating what is going right, to take small steps that can be built on and which are less overwhelming for both parents and practitioners.
- There is a need to find mechanisms to notice and share the ‘green shoots’, to disseminate more widely and encourage others to adopt positive practices. This is an essential first route to scale.

These approaches will still need to confront the gap between aspirations and practices.

“There's lots of things that we're asked to do in legislation and policy guidance and [we talk about it] but we'd never follow through in the implementation. So, it's how do we embed these things in practice, so it becomes part of daily practice?” (EA, SL, 2024)

Further to several recommendations about governance, the Children’s Services Review also proposes:

- The creation of a leadership programme that focuses on priorities and styles required to embed collective and collaborative leadership approaches across integrated children’s services.
- The promotion of a culture that values transparency, mutual respect and collective responsibility among all service providers, and
- The development of a new partnership approach to the collection, sharing and reporting of data.

In taking this forward, there is rich learning here that can be built upon. On-going learning and evaluation will be important, and we believe that the existing learning framework is a suitable model to continue to track the signs of emergent and systemic change, the enabling factors and barriers to change and longer-term outcomes.

ANNEX 1: Children’s Lives in East Ayrshire: Selected Data from the Data Compendium

This briefing from November 2023 provides useful context for the work of WM2U and gives a flavour of the social conditions of the communities in which this work is taking place. It shares selective data relevant to the lives and wellbeing of children in East Ayrshire. The focus is on south locality or Ward 8 (Cumnock and New Cumnock) where the data is available from the recently issued Data Compendium (East Ayrshire, 2023). Otherwise, the data reported is for East Ayrshire as a whole.

This briefing also draws on data from the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020 (SIMD). This measures relative deprivation across 6,976 small areas or data zones. This index captures the extent to which an area is deprived across seven domains: income, employment, education, health, access to services, crime and housing.

School Roll Data 2022

Local Schools	Free School Meals (%)	% of children from minority ethnic groups
Muirkirk Primary	70-80%	0%
Netherthird Primary	70-80%	0-<5%
Lochnorris Primary*	70-80%	*
Cherry Trees Early Years Centre*	n/a	n/a
Logan Primary and Early Childhood centre	80-90%	0%
Mauchline Primary	70-80%	0-<5%
Hillside School (specialist)*	n/a	0%
Robert Burns Academy*	n/a	0-<5%

*schools located on Barony Campus

Poverty

More than one in four children under 16 are living in poverty: the estimated percentage of children aged 0-15 in East Ayrshire living in poverty (after housing costs) has generally increased in recent years, from 24.4% in 2014/15 to 27.2% in 2021/22.

DWP data suggests that in the Cumnock and New Cumnock Ward there are 639 children under 16 living in relatively low-income families.

Children registered with a dentist

The percentage of children registered with a dentist has fallen in both East Ayrshire and Scotland.

The sharpest drop in registration was between 2020 and 2021 where registration fell by 5.8% in East Ayrshire and 5.2% in Scotland.

From 2021 to 2022 it has fallen a further 3.8% and 2.7% respectively. This decline is likely associated with the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of restrictions and pressures experienced in Dental services.

Dental Health in Primary 1

Primary 1 pupil dental health has improved in both East Ayrshire and Scotland over the period 2017/18 to 2021/22 and has significantly improved in the Southern locality over the period reported, increasing by 14.2% overall. However, in 2021/22, there was still over 31% of P1 children with some signs of dental decay in the southern locality.

Rates of school absence

Rates of primary school absence in the southern locality were stable at 6.3% between 2017-18 and 2019-20, but increased to 9.7% in 2021/22.

Rates of secondary school absence in the southern locality fluctuated between 11-12% in the years from 2017-18, increasing to 16.6% in 2021/22.

Educational outcomes

Educational outcomes (as measured by attainment of SCQF levels) are worse for children looked after at home than for those looked after away from home.⁵³

Percentage of School Leavers Achieving Literacy & Numeracy at SCQF Level 4 2021/22, East Ayrshire

- Looked After Away from Home: 69.6%
- Looked After at Home: 50%

Pupils Receiving Clothing and Footwear Grants

The percentage of East Ayrshire pupils receiving clothing and footwear grants has fluctuated since 2016/17.

In 2021/22, 31% of primary school pupils and 24.7% of secondary school pupils were in receipt of Clothing and Footwear Grants.

Referral to the Scottish Children's Reporter

There has been a big decline in children referred to the reporter, in hearings held and supervision requirements made.

The vast majority of referrals to the Scottish Children's Reporter were submitted by the Police: in 2021/22, 74.9% of referrals in East Ayrshire were made by Police.

⁵³ It is important to note that although the 'intensity' of an intervention is greater when a child is looked after away from home, the fact that they have been removed from home may not be an indication of reduced wellbeing.

Child Protection

The number of child protection registrations has generally declined over the last five years, although the de-registrations have decreased over that time.

The number of investigations completed generally declined over the time period reported, falling continuously from 2018/19 to 2021/22 by 41%, followed by an increase of 9.6% from 2021/22 to 2022/23.

The number of children on the register as of 30th June has fluctuated over the last five years, with 81 children on the register in 2022.

A notable demographic shift has taken place over the last five years in relation to the ages of children on the child protection register. In 2019 less than 10% of registered children were Under 5 years old, but by 2023 this had increased to almost half (46.9%).

Looked After Children

The number of looked after children in East Ayrshire has fluctuated over the time period reported: in 2022/23 there were 108 looked after children, of which 42% were living at home with their parents.

Recorded Domestic Incidents, with a Child under 16

The number of domestic incidents reported with a child under 16 present has steadily increased in East Ayrshire. A FOI information request to Police Scotland shows that from 2018 to 2022, the number of incidents increased by 60.3%, so that in 2022 there were 566 recorded incidents. The sharpest increase occurred between 2020 and 2021 (17.6%).

Referrals to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

The number of CAMHS referrals has increased significantly over the last 10 years, from 568 in 2013/14 to 988 in 2022/23. Whilst the proportion of referrals accepted has fluctuated, it has increased over that time period from 84.5% to 93.7% - which means that over 9 in 10 referrals are now accepted.

Homelessness

The number of homeless presentations from households with children or expectant mothers has increased significantly (74%) between 2018/19 and 2022/23. The number of households with children or expectant mothers who had a stay in temporary accommodation increased by 56% over the same time period.

The number of homeless presentations from 16/17 year olds has generally increased over the last five years, with a notable rise recorded in 2021/22 to 36, of which over half had a stay in temporary accommodation.

ANNEX 2: East Ayrshire Stories 2023

Feeling safe to speak up

I do feel safe to speak up in our community – at least when I'm in the WM2U environment. We still need trust and safety - I'd say we're not there yet with services. I don't feel I can take trust for granted just yet.

Being in the community group and being part of WM2U is important to me. We have learned from recent events that we are still learning! But that motivates us to push forward. There's always something to be done and you can't do it on your own, so I'd say we are getting there as a team.

I went on the Columba 1400 course several years ago and I admit it was difficult for me. I was so nervous - my anxiety was at 100! They were so nice and welcoming, but at the end of the first day I said, 'I'm not coming back, this isn't for me!' Well, I did go back the next day and I'm so glad I did. People knew I had bad anxiety and the support I was given was amazing.

Being part of the groups since then has helped me stick with it. It has changed me so much. The medication I've been taking for anxiety and depression is now significantly reduced. I've also lost quite a bit of weight. I used to shut myself in my room, but now I enjoy going for long walks. I was in care between when I was younger and since then I've had to learn everything, cooking and cleaning and personal hygiene - skills for life. I like making people feel welcome and other people say that I'm good at that. I have two children, one is at college now and although the other one is still at school and has some challenges, I do feel that I have done a good job with them. My community has nothing so I provide what I can for the kids. Just now I'm planning an Easter egg hunt.

Everyday courage

I am supporting a lot of parents in this community and trying to help everyone. Sometimes I'm asked or I ask myself "what's my 'why'?" Why do I do this work that I'm not paid for? That's a tough question, but on a good day, I'd say the answer is that I see small acts of everyday courage everywhere. I've witnessed so many examples of personal change in people. It's the people that give me the motivation to keep going.

Just a few examples will give you the idea. One mum who volunteered in the school and went on a 16-week college course on the back of that now also helps out and attends lots of community-based activities. I see how much she has grown in confidence and takes the initiative, despite her struggles with her kids.

Another woman took control of the breakfast club when I was away recently. In the past very often she would storm out. I think she feels safe here, so we must be doing something right.

One guy who's in recovery would only come along to things sporadically in the past. Now he's done three certificates that will allow him to lead on things, like walking groups. He's also shared with me how he responds so much better to things, where his reactions in the past would have made things much worse for everyone, not just himself. And another man made the decision to access support for recovery but struggled to get to appointments

because he had no money and no way of getting there. He said he wasn't going to go but felt he had failed even before he'd started. Between several community members, he was given a lift there, someone waited for him and brought him home. Some four weeks on he's doing well and engages regularly at community groups and has since volunteered to do things with the group.

A response not a reaction

I am part of the social work team with responsibility for addictions and recently had to go to see a single mum who is known to us from a time in the past when her child had been removed from her care. I knew from a colleague that she'd had some devastating news about her own health. I suggested and it was agreed that we should take it in steps, and we decided that we'd try to wrap support around what she and her child needed to get her through.

She was initially upset, and her immediate reaction was to go straight to the worst outcome, and she said to me 'don't take my child away from me!' I just took it right back to basics. She was due to go for an urgent operation and because she was fearful for her child, she was talking about not going to hospital. She's really isolated with few friends or family around to help. I said to her "We as a service will be with you every step of the way". And I sat with her, and we made a plan, what would happen when she goes into hospital, how her child would be cared for and get to school, and how I and others could support her in her recovery. I changed my own plans so that I could pick her up from hospital and the weekend team made sure they were around to support also. I admit it could have gone very differently if we had taken a formal child protection route or if this had occurred out of hours. We very often react to information and instead, we tried to think as a team about what was the most child centred and helpful response. I think it influenced the plan going forward and let's face it, it made us all feel like we are actually doing something to help.

Joint Working Experience

I'm part of the intensive support team in social work since October 2022. I've been working with Michael since the end of October 2022. At aged 11, he was getting involved in what we might call 'low level offending', along with other young people his age, being a nuisance in the community and he'd been picked up by the police several times, so it was getting serious.

I visited the house three times each week to try to get to know him, but I was getting nowhere with him. It was very clear to me that he'd rather spend time with his friends in the community than with me. I realised I had to rethink and rather than going with my preconceived ideas of what might work, I put myself in his shoes.

I was able to access additional money which is only available as a preventative measure in attempt to maintain children and young people continuing to stay with their families. My instinct was to support him to spend time with his friends, as that felt more natural to him. We went Go-Carting with one of his friends after he suggested this, and a couple of weeks later we brought another friend along too and we all went to the local McDonald's. In fact, he'd been barred from there but through a bit of charm I was able to get them in and demonstrate they were still part in their community. Before I got involved with Michael, his

mum had been trying to do these kinds of things with him, but she was quite exhausted and wasn't really getting anywhere.

I think he and I have a better relationship now; I have a better understanding of what makes him tick and have information to develop a much more personalised plan for him. Four months ago, he hadn't been attending school. He still hasn't, but he has recently asked to go back to school, I expect because one of his friends is at the school.

I'm quite pleased that I stuck my neck out. I guess what happened is that I felt comfortable and more confident. It's been handy to have the WhatsApp group to stay connected to the people I met back in December on the values-based leadership programme. And I'm pleased now too about his Mum as she's also getting involved again taking him out with his friends and it feels like we are working as a team.

I think we need to stop

I was alerted to the needs of a family by the school. It was a family where social work knew of their circumstances and had tried to work with them to make changes in the past without much progress. The child had been moved from their home on a temporary basis due to the immediate concerns although they were keen to go back home if they could.

It had stuck in my mind that one of the parents at the recent values-based leadership experience had said 'it's the small things that make a difference'. I realised that we were asking too much of the mother. Every service had bombarded her with information all at once. I said, 'I think we need to stop! We are giving you mountains to climb' – and she said 'yes, and I can't even get out of bed'. So, I changed tack and instead I asked, 'what can I do today?' She said the issue was her heating – she'd not had heating for over a year. We got onto her landlord, and it was fixed within a week.

The relationship has built from there, and we do small tasks every week, things like making the house more homely. She really responds positively to this approach. She decides what's important and we tackle it together, but she takes the lead. Her child is back home with her now and is off the child protection register. Things aren't entirely sorted out, but the prospects are much better as she does engage with most services now.

Food parcels

As a social worker, I have been allocated a pre-birth assessment, where there's lots of chaos in relation to several substances being consumed, homelessness, domestic violence, and mental health issues. The woman is really not at a stage of being able to change or to positively engage with me. So, I was thinking of what I can offer at the moment to help get a better outcome for the baby and mother and I thought if I can at least provide food and nourishment, then perhaps when the baby is born, things might physically be a bit better. I have put in a request for money for a weekly food parcel. After a short wait, I got the go ahead, so I was pleased about that. It's also led to a meeting I was at yesterday, a 'Bump to Baby' group, which they are looking at as a 'test of change', to see if this can help create better outcomes. I suggested we offer a weekly food parcel for the pregnant women to take home as well as the practical information sessions they are offering, so fingers crossed that comes off too.

Bibliography of Learning Partner and Funders Reports

These reports are all available on the WM2U website. <https://wm2u.co.uk/>

Codifying Our Learning to Support Scale, Funders Report (April 2024)

Written by the funders, this paper sets out their current practice wisdom, learning from the ongoing learning and evaluation and supported by lessons from the literature and practice reviews.

Where Should We Look for System Change? Learning Update (August 2023)

This learning report shares our thinking about how to measure and evaluate system change and offers emerging evidence of impact so far. This report prepares the ground for a report planned for June 2024 that will provide a fuller five-year retrospective account and evaluation of progress towards the desired outcomes.

Practising What We All Preach (August 2023)

WM2U and the Nest Wellbeing Group co-hosted a local “Grow as We Go” learning event in June 2023. The report highlights the importance of opening clear and constructive dialogues between communities, the families that live within them and service providers as a tool to enact useful change and provide ‘supportive support’.

What Would Young People Like Adults to Know? (July 2023)

The “Hope-Hack” (Hackathon) was a full-day, large-scale event for young people held in June 2023 at Ayrshire College in Kilmarnock. This briefing is based on the perspectives of those adults that acted as facilitators and is designed to be shared amongst all those with an interest in enhancing the voice and agency of young people in East Ayrshire.

WM2U Contributing to Systems Change (March 2023)

This is a short policy-oriented briefing that highlights the potential for a ‘WM2U approach’ to contribute to the practical realisation of the goals of public service reform.

WM2U Literature and Practice Review (December 2022)

This review explores national and international allied developments amongst those looking to achieve system change in policy and community contexts similar to those of WM2U. It provides a brief synopsis of initiatives or reports that are of most relevance or have been highlighted recently as being of likely interest, supplemented by several accounts of practice.

Our Digest of Practice Lessons (December 2022)

A short digest of the key elements from the Literature and Practice Review.

What Matters to You: How Do We Go to Scale? Interim Report (March 2021)

This interim report sets the scene at an important juncture of the work of WM2U, to inform decisions about the future direction of the work. It draws on material from earlier reports dating back to the commencement of the work in early 2019.

What Matters to You: a Brief Literature Review (December 2019)

This small-scale scoping review helps to position the WM2U approach in a context of what is known about work with children on the edges of care and place-based approaches to system change – and the connections between the two areas of work.